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National Phonography

Field Recording and Sound Archiving in Postwar Britain

Tom Western

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Music
University of Edinburgh
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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis, submitted in candidature for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh, and the research within it is my own work, except where explicitly stated in the text, and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Tom Western

10 August 2015

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Abstract

Vast numbers of historical field recordings are currently being digitised and disseminated online; but what are these field recordings—and how do they resonate today? This thesis addresses these questions by listening to the digitisation of recordings made for a number of ethnographic projects that took place in Britain in the early 1950s. Each project shared a set of logics and practices I call national phonography. Recording technologies were invested with the ability to sound and salvage the nation, but this first involved deciding what the nation was, and what it was supposed to sound like. National phonography was an institutional and technological network; behind the encounter between recordist and recorded lies a complex and variegated mess of cultural politics, microphones, mediality, sonic aesthetics, energy policies, commercial interests, and music formats.

The thesis is structured around a series of historical case studies. The first study traces the emergence of Britain's field recording moment, connecting it to the waning of empire, and focusing on sonic aspects of the 1951 Festival of Britain and the recording policies of national and international folk music organisations. The second study listens to the founding of a sound archive at the University of Edinburgh, also in 1951, asking how sound was used in constructing Scotland as an object of study, stockpiling the nation through the technologies and ideologies of preservation. The third study tracks how the BBC used fieldwork – particularly through its Folk Music and Dialect Recording Scheme (1952-57) – as part of an effort to secure the aural border. The fourth study tells the story of *The Columbia World Library of Folk and Primitive Music*, produced by Alan Lomax while based in Britain and released in 1955. Here, recordings were presented in fragments as nations were written onto long-playing records, and the project is discussed as a museum of voice.

The final chapter shifts perspective to the online circulation of these field recordings. It asks what an online sound archive is, hearing how recordings compress multiple agencies which continue to unfold on playback, and exploring the archival silences built into sonic productions of nations. Finally, online archives are considered as heritage sites, raising questions about whose nation is produced by national phonography. This thesis brings together perspectives from sound studies and ethnomusicology; and contributes to conversations on the history of ethnomusicology in Europe, the politics of technology, ontologies of sound archives, and theories of recorded sound and musical nationalisms.

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Introduction

I'd like to start this thesis by returning to the time when I began working on it. It's early 2012, and the Association for Cultural Equity has just made the entirety of Alan Lomax's hefty collection of field recordings from 1946 onwards available to stream online for free.¹ The media goes into a (modest) frenzy, sputtering out spits of hyperbole: Martin Chilton, writing in the *Telegraph*, declares Lomax to be 'the leading musicologist of the twentieth century'; while Larry Rohter of the *New York Times* claims that much of what people have 'learned about folk and traditional music stems from his efforts, which were also directly responsible for the folk music and skiffle booms in the United States and Britain that shaped the pop-music revolution of the 1960s and beyond'.² Inevitably the number of music fans (myself included) that headed to this digitised musical wonderland caused the Cultural Equity website to overload.

The excitement has died down a little now, and we can begin to answer some big questions: What exactly is an online sound archive? What are these old recordings? What labours do they perform today? At first blush, it seems as though Anthony Seeger's prediction that recordists will be remembered more for their recordings than their laboured theories has proved correct in this case.³ Very little of the media coverage on this digital dissemination has dwelt on, say, the intricacies of cantometrics. And a quick glance at the Cultural Equity website suggests a rather theory-free musical experience. I click, I click, I listen, and at no point do I get Lomax – who was known for his

¹ <http://research.culturalequity.org/home-audio.jsp> (all websites last accessed 20/7/2015)

² Martin Chilton, 'Lomax Archive Goes Online', *Telegraph*, 31/1/2012; Larry Rohter, 'Folklorist's Global Jukebox Goes Digital', *New York Times*, 30/1/2012

³ Anthony Seeger, 'The Role of Sound Archives in Ethnomusicology Today', *Ethnomusicology*, 30: 2 (1986), 267

heavy curatorial style – popping up and expounding on, for instance, the homologies between singing style and the social structure of gender relations and attitudes toward sex; which is probably a good thing.

What this thesis sets out to explore, however, is how recordings can actually be suffused *with* theory; how they contain the circumstances of their production within them; and how they conceal or compress relations of social, institutional, and material labour and power. The digitisation and circulation of Lomax's recordings is just one of many similar projects of online dissemination over the last few years, through which a tremendous number of archival recordings have become available to listening publics in new ways. The monuments of ethnomusicological recording are re-sounding. This thesis is an effort to understand this moment through some of these recordings.

My answer to the questions posed a couple of paragraphs ago begins by stating the need to study the histories of field recording and sound archiving. To make sense of recordings in the present—to know what they might be and what we might do with them. Recordings have particular materialities and qualities. Recordings – commissioned, produced, archived, reproduced, disseminated, consumed – have occupied a central space in the movement of music for over a century, straddling phenomena of nationalism, globalisation, and cosmopolitanism; being at once carefully controlled by a host of gatekeepers, business interests, advocates, state funders, collectors, validators, interpreters, and also evading such control in the hands and ears of listeners. Martin Stokes puts it better than I can: 'Recordings are not simply inert objects of social scientific or historical enquiry. They are energetic and conversational creatures, alive to us in time and space'.⁴ Recordings are not just the produce of history, but are producers of ongoing discourse about history.

What follows is a study of field recording and sound archiving in postwar Britain. In the years following World War II, particularly between 1950 and 1955, a string of projects were undertaken in Britain that produced recordings and built archives on a scale unlike anything heard before or since. The

⁴ Martin Stokes, *The Republic of Love: Cultural Intimacy in Turkish Popular Music* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 8

International Folk Music Council (IFMC) was formed in 1947, based in London, encouraging exchanges of recordings between nations; the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS) sought to reach new audiences through recorded sound; a School of Scottish Studies was founded at the University of Edinburgh in 1951, with the task of building a sound archive at the centre of its activities; the BBC launched its Folk Music and Dialect Recording Scheme in 1952; Alan Lomax came to Europe from the United States in 1950, basing himself in London to produce the *Columbia World Library of Folk and Primitive Music*, released in 1955.

These projects, then, were events within Britain's field recording moment—a moment that lasted several years, during which time knowledge about national culture was performed and inscribed, taking on new materialities and filling space in archives, broadcasting, and the marketplace. Many of these projects were historically contained, beginning and ending within this field recording moment. Others continue today; but even these ongoing projects conducted their fieldwork most energetically during this period. Hamish Henderson – of the School of Scottish Studies, and one of the protagonists of this study – spoke of the early 1950s as 'the Golden Age of Scots folk collecting'.⁵ The recordings produced during this period make up a good deal of those now streaming online. The past and the present thus interrelate. The field recording moment and the current digitisation moment are connected; and I aim to tie these two moments together, telling a history of the present.

Britain's field recording moment was fixated on the concept of the nation. Projects of recording and archiving had much in common, and together they articulate a set of practices and logics I term *national phonography*. Recording technologies were invested with the ability to sound the nation in the decade following the war, but this involved first deciding what, who, and when the nation was. Pre-industrial pasts and rural spaces were privileged, and certain traditions were held as vital to national integrity.

These logics operated across institutions, often involving the same people working for several institutions at once. And they work according to the belief – described by Philip Bohlman in relation to recording projects conducted in

⁵ Timothy Neat, *Hamish Henderson, A Biography: Volume 2, Poetry Becomes People* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2009), 56

Central Europe during World War I – that sound recording afforded the collection of fragments of the nation, which could then be reassembled. Recording technology thus ‘engendered a conviction that authenticity was inscribed in these fragments of the past’; that recorded sound could preserve the nation.⁶ That little comparable recording had been done in Britain lent a sense of urgency to postwar fieldwork. The lateness of the recording moment meant that much of it was positioned as salvage: a scramble into the field to rescue and represent musical pasts out of the sonic present. As a result, national phonographers were not documenting the sounds of the nation, but were producing a version of what it was supposed to sound like.

Producing national music was a response to various transnational developments. It sat within a resurgent concern for national wholeness that came with the waning of empire. It stemmed from anxieties about the perceived effects of Americanised mass culture on national identity. Despite, or because of, the great movement of peoples and ideas and musics across Europe and beyond, the field recording moment was predicated on a belief that national identity was a coherent and stable entity, located in the past, and now under threat. This runs counter to the history of Britain as a set of nations of cosmopolitan ancestry, with ever-changing demographics and multiple identities. But postwar cultural changes were heard by British elites as entropic—a symptom of a nation in decline.⁷

At the same time, the efforts of those in charge of packaging national culture in the 1950s were far from orderly. As Heather Wiebe writes of developments in musical modernism in Britain (mostly England) during the same period: ‘their methods were far from systematic; they were haphazard

⁶ Philip Bohlman, *Music, Nationalism, and the Making of the New Europe*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2011), 44. ‘The wartime recording projects relied on a belief in a triangulated calculus with three sets of coordinates: authenticity, inscription, nation’

⁷ Laura Tabili, ‘A Homogeneous Society? Britain’s Internal “Others”, 1800-Present’ in *At Home With the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, ed. Hall and Rose (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 53–76. Entropy describes a doctrine of inevitable social or cultural degeneration. Tony Judt writes of the ‘ambivalent mood’ of postwar Britain: that despite having won a war and embarked upon an unprecedented experiment in welfare capitalism, ‘cultural commentators were absorbed by intimations of failure and deterioration’. Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (London: Vintage Books, 2010), 205

and experimental, highly contested, and often utterly failed'.⁸ This holds true for the recording and archiving projects described here, which struggled with the multiple geographies of the nation. Some recordists heard England and Britain as interchangeable; others were Scottish nationalists and sought cultural connections elsewhere; none gave much attention to Wales.

Wales doesn't feature much in this thesis, reflecting the short shrift it was given in many of the projects under discussion. Lomax's *Columbia World Library* included volumes of music for England, Scotland, and Ireland, but not Wales. The BBC's recording scheme touched on Wales but gave most of its focus to rural southern England. The Welsh Folk Song Society was founded in 1906, and Ruth Herbert Lewis and others made cylinder recordings in the 1910s. Postwar recording was mostly conducted out of the Welsh Folk Museum (now St Fagans), which opened in 1948 and began collecting folk songs in 1957 following the appointment of Vincent Phillips. But Wales was not given much attention in the broader field recording moment. I have also chosen to limit my study to Britain and not to include Ireland. Although recording work in England and Scotland was very much connected to that in Ireland, to be able to get close enough to make sense of the projects under discussion I felt it necessary to limit my geographical scope in this way.

Insular national consolidations were part of international conversations in other ways. Folk musics were heard as a vehicle for tolerance and understanding, and thus for the maintenance of peace in Europe, as archivists in Britain joined with their colleagues across the continent in a postwar climate of diplomacy and mutualism. Recording and archiving were employed to rebuild national cultures and international relations. A dialectic of the national and the international thus runs through this thesis, as national cultures were sonically exchanged with each other through the IFMC and its connections to the also-new UNESCO. This, too, fed into the urgency with which recording projects were conducted. Britain needed recordings of itself in order to acquire recordings of elsewhere.

But this dialectic failed to respond to two enormous phenomena that were accelerating in mid-century, to which Britain has contributed

⁸ Heather Wiebe, *Britten's Unquiet Pasts: Sound and Memory in Postwar Reconstruction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 9

disproportionately through history: migration and displacement. Florian Scheduling and Erik Levi write of the twenty-seven million people displaced by World War II, and of how musicology has neglected them.⁹ Moreover, the people arriving in the British Isles from the West Indies and South Asia were considered postwar migrants rather than imperial subjects.¹⁰

Conceptualisations of folk music in postwar Europe remained in thrall to romantic notions of nationness, and those with the power to define national music in Britain showed no desire to budge their stance on what such music was, or could be. Many voices were silenced in the pursuit of national music. So while Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose argue that British history has to be transnational, and while the movement of peoples from colonies to metropole is key to the story of postwar Britain, the field recording moment was one of territorialism, sounding a pure nation and asserting national belonging.¹¹

National phonography thus sits right on the line where the national becomes the nationalist. It is a line that is murky and easily smudged. But here I follow Bohlman's differentiation of the national and the nationalist in music. The national, for Bohlman, is generated from within, uses metaphors (especially nature metaphors) to stress the origins of the nation, and treats the national language as distinctive. The nationalist, meanwhile, hears culture as under threat from outside, emphasises survival over origins, and imbues cosmopolitanism with a sense of loss.¹² Most of the projects discussed here contain elements of both the national and the nationalist, flitting back and forth across the line depending on circumstance. I have chosen the term national – not nationalist – phonography, mostly because these recording and archiving projects weren't about competition with other nations, or asserting national

⁹ Florian Scheduling and Erik Levi, 'Introduction' in *Music and Displacement: Diasporas, Mobilities, and Dislocations in Europe and Beyond*, ed. Levi and Scheduling (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 1-11

¹⁰ Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose, 'Introduction: Being at Home with the Empire' in *At Home with the Empire*, ed. Hall and Rose, 4

¹¹ 'British history, we are convinced, has to be transnational, recognising the ways in which our history has been one of connections across the globe, albeit in the context of unequal relations of power'. Hall and Rose, 'At Home with the Empire', 5

¹² Bohlman, *Music, Nationalism, and the Making of the New Europe*, 60. Similarly, Martin Stokes argues that a musical cosmopolitanism is required to develop a musical nationalism: 'to successfully assert its authenticity in a sea of competing nationalisms and authenticities'. Stokes, 'On Musical Cosmopolitanism', *The Macalester International Roundtable*, 2007, 6

superiority (although sometimes they were). This isn't to say they were entirely benevolent. National phonography proliferated at what was heard as a historically critical moment, articulating postwar anxiety about national identity.¹³

Taping for Science

The field recording moment in Britain was coincident with the coinage of the word 'ethno-musicology'. First published by Dutch scholar Jaap Kunst in 1950, it fused musicology and ethnology, and placed the concept of *ethnos* – Greek for nation, and referring to people of the same race – at the centre of the new field of study.¹⁴ Early ethnomusicology was marked by claims to science, and efforts to cleanly demarcate styles of music. Focus was given to non-European musics and the folk musics of Europe; 'European art and popular (entertainment) music do not belong to its field'.¹⁵ The split between folk and popular musics usually amounted to a split between rural and urban cultures. National musics were to be located in the countryside.

Early ethnomusicological fieldwork was heard as neutral, ethically unproblematic, objective. Kunst gave detailed direction on how to obtain songs from 'primitive' peoples and what rewards – mostly jewellery and cigarettes – should be offered in return.¹⁶ Technology was key to this development: 'Ethno-musicology could never have grown into an independent science if the gramophone had not been invented. Only then was it possible to record the musical expressions of foreign races and peoples objectively'.¹⁷ As with earlier comparative musicology, discourses of hard science and data

¹³ Bohlman, *Music, Nationalism, and the Making of the New Europe*, 69

¹⁴ Jaap Kunst, *Musicologica: A Study of the Nature of Ethno-Musicology, Its Problems, Methods, and Representative Personalities* (Amsterdam: Indisch Instituut, 1950); Timothy Rice, *Ethnomusicology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3

¹⁵ Kunst, *Musicologica*, 1

¹⁶ Jaap Kunst, *Ethno-Musicology: A Study of its Nature, its Problems, Methods, and Representative Personalities to which is added a Bibliography*, 2nd edn (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1955), 21-23

¹⁷ Kunst, *Ethno-Musicology*, 19

gathering were invoked to keep others at a sanitised distance.¹⁸ Ethnomusicologists listening to remote places shared ideas and methods and professional organisations with those keeping their ears on Europe. And similar logics were applied within European nations.

Raymond Williams describes how the same binaries of civilised and primitive, future and past were mapped onto urban and rural culture in England through the trope of the pastoral.¹⁹ So it was with the field recording moment across Britain, where recordists relentlessly placed their subjects in an earlier time. Moreover, unlike ethnomusicology in the United States, which was also nascent in this period and was dominated by anthropological perspectives, the discipline in Europe was closely connected to museums.²⁰ Fieldwork was thus about collecting; gathering specific text-objects for specific purposes.

¹⁸ Martin Stokes, 'Afterword: A Worldly Musicology?' in *The Cambridge History of World Music*, ed. Philip Bohlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 828-29

¹⁹ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 2011[1973]), 9-12; James Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Allegory' in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. Clifford and Marcus (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986), 113

²⁰ Stokes, 'A Worldly Musicology', 830. This dichotomy isn't quite so clear-cut, however; ethnomusicology on both sides of the Atlantic developed with at least two competing sets of approaches. Bruno Nettl recalls this tension existing at the IFMC conference of 1950, held in Bloomington, Indiana. Here, one group of scholars – mostly with backgrounds in folklore and musical performance – moved easily between intellectual and artistic modes, and retained something of a textual focus. Another group came mostly from anthropology, and considered the former practices as somewhat frivolous. This latter group later provided much of the intellectual leadership of American ethnomusicology, expressed most famously by Alan Merriam in his 1964 book, *The Anthropology of Music*. Nettl recounts how Merriam dismissed the work of the IFMC as a society of folksingers and dancers, concerned only with music alone, and not interested in its place(s) in society. The Society for Ethnomusicology was founded in reflection of the anthropological background of its leaders, and was a particularly American organisation, in contrast to the more European IFMC. Nettl, *Nettl's Elephant: On the History of Ethnomusicology* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 138-44. At the same time, however, Maud Karpeles wrote in her editorial of the first issue of the IFMC's journal of the Council's intent to study 'folk music as a live social and artistic manifestation', suggesting a contextual focus to its early work. Yet she also wrote in the same piece of folk music as a 'disappearing traditional art', of the need to 'preserve our remaining heritage', and of 'methods of recording and notation ... to give as faithful a reproduction as possible'. IFMC, 'Editorial', *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* 1 (1949), 1-2. So in many ways the IFMC sat at an intellectual crossroads, at once maintaining practices of salvage and preservation, but also moving towards anthropological methods. Both positions were present in the Council's early work. Its founding was thus marked by a theoretical shift within ethnomusicology more

Given that mid-century fieldworkers heard themselves as scientists, this study follows a broad epistemological trend that has turned away from science and towards attempting to describe what those claiming to be scientists were actually doing.²¹ For despite their claims to science, there was a great political paradox at the heart of national phonography. Highly conservative and reactionary attitudes to cultural change were glossed with discourses of contributing towards world peace. Recordists frequently claimed to be championing the marginal and giving voice to the voiceless, but were often hostile towards the improvements in living standards that mark this period of British political history. Certain sounds were elevated to the status of national music, but those recorded weren't given much say in which of their songs should be preserved. And most people weren't recorded at all.

Instead, national phonographers were concerned with the staking out of sonic space for certain traditions in the aural public sphere – to borrow a useful phrase from Ana María Ochoa – of postwar Britain.²² This aural history is not just about scholarship, but about the spaces where scholarship and mass media overlap. Histories of fieldwork are often both. Each recording project differed in its intended outcome and its medium. And although the logics of national phonography are consistent throughout, the production of recordings was tailored to the archive, to broadcasting, or to commercial release. I therefore attempt to locate field recordings fully in their media histories: listening closely to how each medium shaped the sounds recorded.

Significantly, the mediation of recordings took place before they were produced. The term *mediality* is a better fit for the field recordings described here, in that mediation is not something that *happened to* recordings after they were made, but was something *built into* the recordings in the first place. I

broadly, and this tension filtered through into the projects in which the IFMC was – directly or indirectly – involved.

²¹ Howard Becker, 'The Epistemology of Qualitative Research' in *Ethnography and Human Development*, ed. Jessor, Colby and Shweder (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 54-55. This idea has probably been developed most thoroughly by Bruno Latour. See, for instance, Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987); and Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993)

²² Ana María Ochoa Gautier, 'Sonic Transculturation, Epistemologies of Purification and the Aural Public Sphere in Latin America', *Social Identities* 12: 6 (2006), 803-25

agree with Jonathan Sterne, that of all the terms available – mediafication, mediatisation – it is *mediality* that most evokes a quality of media, rather than a (usually pejorative) process or historical sequence.²³ One consequence of this idea is that a clean binary between field and studio recordings, whereby field recordings are heard as the truthful counterparts of the artifice of the studio, is challenged. Field recording was often about applying the techniques of the studio in the field.

To make sense of this, I place technologies front and centre in the mix. Microphones, recording machines, electricity supplies, and magnetic tape are all as important here as the institutions and individuals who used them. Field recording projects were thoroughly modern endeavours, despite positioning themselves against modernity. In this regard, I take my lead from Emily Thompson, who argues that modernity and modernism should be conceived in terms of everyday materials as well as great artists.²⁴ Magnetic tape is particularly important to these stories: facilitating recording and archiving practices; improving sound quality; stimulating discourses of fidelity. Kunst again: 'the new apparatuses not only enable us to obtain an infinitely better rendering – hardly, if at all, inferior to the original performance – they also allow of uninterrupted recording lasting, if desired, as long as 72 minutes'.²⁵ Portability, recording length, signal to noise ratio—each of these features of tape fostered the sense that recordings offered more direct access to tradition and history, to the nation.

As a result of this approach, relatively little focus is given to the performers whose voices and bodies were transposed into national musics. This is by no means to suggest that musicians and singers don't matter, or that recordists are more important; rather, it is a reflection of the power imbalances contained in the case studies under discussion, whereby the ability to produce national

²³ Jonathan Sterne, *MP3: The Meaning of a Format* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 9-11, 251-52

²⁴ 'Unremarkable objects like sound meters and acoustical tiles have as much to say about the ways that people understood their world as do the paintings of Pablo Picasso, the writings of John Dos Passos, the music of Igor Stravinsky, and the architecture of Walter Gropius'. Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1930* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 11

²⁵ Kunst, *Ethno-Musicology*, 21

music was bound up with the technological privilege of recording. I wish to demonstrate how performers were subjected to a set of constraints in recording encounters, predetermined by the logics of national phonography. Musicians and singers were used as source material and as evidence to make political arguments. These histories are about the expediency of culture.²⁶ Ultimately, this is a study of agency—of who gets to produce the nation.

Against Revival

The field recording moment, then, sat at the intersection of technological change, international mutualism, imperial contraction, a resurgence of national culture, nascent ethnomusicology, scientific discourse, mass media, anti-Americanisation, and more. It was perhaps a result of the energies generated by these combined phenomena. And it is because of the complexity of these interrelations that I deliberately steer away from the usual framing of field recording in Britain, that posits it as part of folk revival.

Revival circumscribes its object of study before it has been studied, not following its actors when they move outside of the usual narratives of folk music. It thus places limits on the kinds of connections that can be made in telling histories, and often results in the same stories being retold. Some of the characters that are important to the postwar folk revival are peripheral or absent here. A.L. Lloyd mostly contributed to developments in British folk music revival through his writing and singing. He collected songs in written form, and although he made field recordings in Eastern Europe, the recordings he made in Britain were mostly of himself.²⁷ Not dissimilarly, Ewan MacColl was obviously a hugely influential activist and agitator, singer and strategist; but again the recordings he made were of his own voice. Even when making field recordings with Peggy Seeger and Charles Parker for the *Radio Ballads*, a

²⁶ George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004)

²⁷ Plenty of songbooks were also published during this period. No doubt recordings existed in dialogue with printed collections (and certain written music collections have been undergoing their own digitisation moment of late, such as EFDSS's 'Full English' project – <http://www.efdss.org/efdss-the-full-english>). But recordings remain my focus here: because of labours involved in their making; their materiality; the discourse they generate; and the notion that they provide unmediated access to musical performance

series of programmes broadcast on the BBC between 1958 and 1964, MacColl recorded dialogue that was then worked up into new songs that he performed in these sonic montages. While clearly important, the work of Lloyd and MacColl – and their mutual employer, Topic Records – falls outside the scope of this thesis.

Narratives of revival also tend to posit the work of their protagonists as toiling against the mainstream currents of culture, or even existing outside of them altogether, until being co-opted and neutralised by mass media when folk music ‘boomed’ in the early 1960s. This isn’t completely untrue. But it privileges some stories over others, and it glosses the fact that early 1950s field recording was heavily institutionalised: sponsored and funded by government grants, elite universities, the globally-renowned national broadcaster, and what was then the world’s biggest record label. Though these projects heard themselves as rescue operations, they were also a part of the culture they positioned themselves against, making for a much messier set of cultural politics than narratives of salvage usually allow for. Many of the people featured in this study were indeed concerned with revivalism, and heard themselves as part of the revival movement. But many weren’t; and shifting perspective away from revival allows their stories to be told.

Grouping the Nation

National musics were produced, brought into being, through recording and archiving. This isn’t to say that they were fabricated by recordists, or that they were invented traditions; but that certain sounds were gathered together under the sign of the nation, making them national. Folk and traditional musics lent themselves particularly well to ideas of nationness, as Herderian influence continued to pervade the postwar folk music establishment. But it is important to consider how folk musics were also brought into being, rather than taking them as something pre-given. It has become easy to hear folk musics as coherent – even natural – entities, styles, genres, traditions; but this doesn’t account for the labours involved in deciding which sounds and people would constitute folk music, bringing them together in ways that didn’t reflect

everyday musical life, and erasing all that didn't accord with abstract notions of authenticity.

Different kinds of music historiography are useful here. Benjamin Piekut, writing of experimentalism in 1960s New York, asserts that the business of historiography 'keeps two sets of books: one with all the messy overlaps and conflicts, and a second in which these attachments have been snipped away to preserve the cohesion and consistency of a bounded tradition'.²⁸ Robert Fink makes a similar move with the history of American minimal music, arguing that 'the idea that there is a coherent genre of music called "minimalism" is a belated journalistic construction'—one that he chooses not to reify further.²⁹ In both cases, the construction of genres or traditions is performed through grouping disparate people and practices together.

Borrowing from the work of Bruno Latour, it can be said that folk and traditional musics are the result of group formation, rather than being pre-existing groups. Actor-Network Theory (ANT) – a development in which Latour was centrally involved, although far from its only progenitor – presents a challenge to definitions of groups as stable entities, flipping concepts on their head, and asking how they were constructed in the first place.³⁰ Another related idea that is pertinent to the present study comes from Benjamin Filene, for whom the term 'folk music' does not describe a genre or style, but is a

²⁸ Benjamin Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde and its Limits* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011), 5

²⁹ Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves: American Minimal Music as Cultural Practice* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 19

³⁰ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 27-42. It is also important to note that many scholars have by now discredited the term 'folk music', on the grounds that it relies on an idealised and probably fictional 'folk' that existed in complete isolation from industrialisation and the rest of society. See, for instance, Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990), 127-35; and James Porter, 'Europe' in *Ethnomusicology: Historical and Regional Studies*, ed. Helen Myers (London: Macmillan, 1993) 215-39. On a broad academic level in Britain, there has perhaps been a move away from using the term 'folk music' in favour of the seemingly safer but no more precise 'traditional music', reflecting the loss of faith in folk music that saw the International Folk Music Council change its name to the International Council for Traditional Music in 1981. Philip Bohlman, *The Study of Folk Music in the Modern World* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), 1. At the same time, folk music in Britain has been riding a wave of success for roughly a decade at the time of writing. Packaged as part of a broader lifestyle, particularly through festivals, it is currently difficult to hear folk music as anything but a form of popular music.

cipher, 'waiting to be filled'.³¹ The research findings of this thesis fit well with Filene's position. Field recordings were productions to fill that cipher, at a particular moment in history.

My approach, then, is that recordings need to be studied on their own terms, rather than assuming their place within a set of related revivalist activities. Recording as activity, practice, process, doing things with microphones, product. Not as things that just happened, and fell into the lap of the nation. I am thus interested in telling stories about recording: stories involving contestations over voices and the social meaning of those voices.

These are imperial stories. Stories about technology. European stories. They tell of how national musics were sounded through international cultural production. They speak to the contested meanings of Britishness, and to Britain's place in Europe—both with obvious current political valences at the time of writing. And they represent an effort to find ways of writing about field recording and sound archiving that trace as many agencies in their production as possible: connecting them to larger historical events, so as to better understand their circulation in the present. Each chapter thus places histories of fieldwork into broader cultural, diplomatic, and technological networks.

Structure Outline

In Chapter One I consider the work of recordists and archivists in postwar Britain in relation to various literatures. Recent years have seen a growth in studies examining practices of field recording, but there is still something of a shortage of histories. Although ethnomusicology has been paying more attention to technology and to its own history, field recordings have largely been considered useful only to primary research, thus minimising consideration of their production and dissemination. Elsewhere, the study of recordings has been an expanding subfield of historical musicology and popular music studies of late, with numerous recent titles on recorded music; but field recording is peripheral to this field. I read across and beyond music

³¹ Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 3. Please note that from here on in I will not place these terms in quotation marks, but that I interpret them as constructs for the classification and circulation of sounds

studies to argue that more detail is needed to understand what field recordings are and can be, and that we can productively consider ethnographic field recording as a form of phonography.

Chapter Two positions Britain's field recording moment at the end of empire and of a cultural turn inwards. The postwar period marked the culmination of a reconceptualisation of British culture that had seen forms of knowledge previously projected outwards onto the colonies return home. These efforts to remake the nation as a knowable whole found voice in the 1951 Festival of Britain, and this chapter considers how recorded sound figured in this nation building. Focus is given to the work of the EFDSS and IFMC, as well as to a piece of phonography titled *A Sound Picture of Great Britain*, released by HMV for the Festival. I argue that the recording policies of the British folk music establishment contributed to the rush to the field through their inadequacy, but that efforts to locate the nation in rural spaces and particular pasts was not something exclusive to folk music institutes. This, rather, was being conducted on a national level, within government and across the arts.

Chapter Three presents the first full case study of this thesis, focusing on the founding of the sound archive at the University of Edinburgh's School of Scottish Studies. The School – which was established through conversations between scholars in northern Europe, from Scandinavia and from Ireland – employed fieldworkers to make recordings for salvage and research purposes. The nation was thus constructed as an object of study through archiving—a stockpile of national voices. But recordings were made for the archive, and modern classification systems and methods of archiving shaped how they were made, sorting and organising Scottish traditional culture. Rescue fieldwork was furthermore entangled with postwar economic regeneration, with the spread of electricity into the Highlands prompting anxieties about the survival of traditional cultures, but also facilitating the recording of those same cultures.

Chapter Four takes the BBC Folk Music and Dialect Recording Scheme (1952-57) as its case study, tuning into a particular form of radio fieldwork. Here, I outline how broadcasting developed as an international form of communication, but also as a vehicle for nationalism. The BBC Scheme was

shaped by international discussions about the dangers and potentials radio held for folk musics, as broadcasters and ethnomusicologists across Europe shared techniques and ideas. Radio fieldwork was employed to find musics supposedly free from outside influence, and explicitly to make recordings suitable 'for the purposes of broadcasting'. A purified nation was thus archived and broadcast, and the Scheme sat within larger efforts from the top of the BBC to define and disseminate national culture. Any cultural or technical interference from outside was considered a problem, and this chapter plugs the BBC Scheme into the politics of wavelengths and frequency plans in Cold War Europe.

In Chapter Five, I follow the work of Alan Lomax during his time in Europe, when his main endeavour was to produce a *World Library of Folk and Primitive Music* for Columbia Records—an eighteen-volume set of LPs, each one claiming to embody a nation's music. I place Lomax's project in a longer history of commercial world music recording, before examining how the *World Library* was produced through a global network of anthologists, and the agencies that determined which sounds would be included and excluded. I then consider the production techniques of the *World Library* in relation to developments in music production more broadly, before hearing the project as a museum of voice, raising questions about culture collecting and representation.

Chapter Six then shifts perspectives to the present, listening to the widespread digitisation and online dissemination of archival recordings. Here I ask what historical recordings are saying to us, and whose voices we are hearing. This is done by tracking an archival turn currently underway in ethnomusicology, before thinking about recordings as compressed performances, whereby the politics of national phonography are re-performed with each playback. The second half of this chapter focuses on the idea of archival silence, probing how the processes of silencing involved in the production of recordings are performed anew. I turn attention to issues of nationness and race, using the concept of *ethnos* to ask why traditional musics in Britain tend only to refer to white music. Finally, I consider online sound archives as heritage sites; asking whose Britain is being heard through national heritage.

Methods and Aims

This thesis is not a complete history of field recording and sound archiving in postwar Britain. Certainly it is not an attempt to catalogue who and what was recorded, where, when and by whom. I maintain, instead, that in trying to understand histories of recording and archiving, and how we got to where we are, these stories offer a way in, a set of opportunities to discuss histories of fieldwork and their legacies. Focusing each case study on a different medium (Chapter Three on archiving, Chapter Four on broadcasting, Chapter Five on commercial release) also means that this thesis does not unfold in a neat chronology. Rather, each chapter loops back and sets off on different trajectories. Each case study links to the next, as each project strengthened the kinds of groupings that were being made to bring national musics into being.

My methodology for studying recordings involves a tripartite process. First, I have drawn upon written archival materials to track the agencies involved in the production of field recordings, exploring the relationships between institutions, recordists, archivists, technologies, funding bodies, musicians and singers. Second, I have been listening to the recordings produced through national phonography for what they tell us about ideas on nation and culture. And third, I analyse the discourse that was strapped to recorded voices by the recordists in efforts to supervise their reception.

The vast majority of this research, then, has been archival. I have spent time – varying from a couple of weeks to several months in each place – consulting materials at the BBC Written Archives Centre, the School of Scottish Studies, the University of Edinburgh’s Centre for Research Collections, the British Library, the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library at Cecil Sharp House, and the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. At each archive, when researching both written and sound materials, I have sought to pay attention to what is *not* there—to read archives against the grain, to listen to silences.³² Visiting sound archives to listen to silence might seem like an odd thing to do,

³² Rodney Carter, ‘Of Things Said and Unsaid: Power, Archival Silences, and Power in Silence’, *Archivaria*, 61 (2006), 215-33

but it is my contention in this thesis that the sounding nation has been built upon processes of silencing, with serious implications for ideas of nationness and identity, and for political debates on immigration.

For a project concerned with developments in ethnomusicology, this research has involved little by way of systematic fieldwork. I haven't conducted extensive fieldtrips, or undertaken work that I would claim as being ethnographic, despite a belief that ethnographic fieldwork can be an excellent way to answer historical questions as well as better understanding the present. At the same time, I haven't been camped out in archives for the entire duration of this research, and have spent plenty of time in the places where the recordings under discussion here were made (I am from Britain, and have lived in England and Scotland for almost all of my life), as well as paying attention to the uses to which these recordings are now being put. So in some ways this experience relates to the recent rise in ethnomusicological study of fieldwork 'at home'.³³ Certainly it has informed what I write in the chapters that follow; but I can't claim to have performed a full restudy of this historical fieldwork through my own time in the field.³⁴

Moreover, a number of recent projects working with archival recordings have involved efforts to facilitate access to these recordings, to get them back to the communities that made them, and sometimes to elicit responses to the sounds they contain.³⁵ I am in favour of this work, and believe that a vital part of current fieldwork is to try and correct, or at least heal, the tainted legacies of the past. But it seems to me that a slightly different set of issues pertain to the recirculation of national recordings I discuss here; nor does there seem to be any shortage of interest in the dissemination of these

³³ Jonathan Stock and Chou Chiener, 'Fieldwork at Home: European and Asian Perspectives' in *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, 2nd edn, ed. Barz and Cooley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 108-24

³⁴ Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy, 'The First Restudy of Arnold Bake's Fieldwork in India' in *Comparative Musicology and Anthropology of Music: Essays on the History of Ethnomusicology*, ed. Nettl and Bohlman (Chicago: IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 210-27

³⁵ See, for example, the essays in Carolyn Landau and Janet Topp Fargion, ed. 'Ethnomusicology, Archives and Communities: Methodologies for an Equitable Discipline', *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 21: 2 (2012); and Aaron Fox, 'Repatriation as Reanimation through Reciprocity' in *The Cambridge History of World Music*, ed. Philip Bohlman, 522-54

recordings amongst musicians and listeners (as well as there being seemingly more resources for supposedly national musics than those of minority cultures in Britain). To put this another way, I'm not sure recordings made to represent Western nations require the same kind of ethnomusicological intervention at this point, and maybe concerns for social justice can perhaps be better directed elsewhere. I'll return to this thought in the concluding chapter.

It is my hope that this thesis can contribute to current conversations on field recording and sound archiving by providing a sustained, critical account of a historical fieldwork moment. To interpret how this history informs the present moment of circulation, and to hear what remains silent. (I also hope that it might be interesting as a cultural history in its own right.) To be precise, I have three central aims: first, to highlight the roles of technologies in the production of national musics; second, to show how these national musics were the result of European collaborative endeavour, despite being positioned as the exact opposite; and third, to demonstrate that the sounding nation has been built upon silences, as efforts to locate national music erased the voices of the nation's internal others.³⁶

Jonathan Sterne, writing from the perspective of sound studies, argues: 'we must not automatically take any discourse about sound in its own terms, but rather interrogate the terms on which it is built'.³⁷ This makes good sense to me, and I've attempted to bring the history of ethnomusicology into dialogue with sound studies to understand how the movement of sounds was, and is, controlled. Discourse was produced in conjunction with this control, but served to make all traces of cultural production disappear. It is always necessary to think about issues of power – particularly the power of definition – as we follow recordists into the field, follow recordings into the archive, and follow them back out again.

We also need to be specific. Two big ontological questions animate this thesis: What is a field recording? What is a sound archive? In my opinion these

³⁶ Tabili, 'A Homogeneous Society?' 53-76; Bohlman, *Music, Nationalism, and the Making of the New Europe*, 12

³⁷ Jonathan Sterne, 'Sonic Imaginations' in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Sterne (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 9

questions can't be answered in general or universal terms. It is more useful to be able to speak of what recordings and archives were in specific times and places, building concepts out of empiricism, rather than the other way round.³⁸ As ethnomusicology turns its ears back to the archive and back towards Europe,³⁹ I aim to show how national phonography was employed to produce the nation, and to sonically separate the country from the continent. Both of these processes involved a great deal of physical and discursive work, and these labours were always transnational. National music was reliant upon internationalism. Not that you'd know it from listening to what was recorded.

³⁸ Georgina Born, 'On Musical Mediation: Ontology, Technology and Creativity, *Twentieth-Century Music*, 2: 1 (2005), 30; Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 9

³⁹ A couple more quick ideas before this introduction finishes. Bohlman – it's probably clear by now that he's a big influence – writes that one of mid-century ethnomusicology's key shifts was to turn away from Europe as a unified continent: 'European ethnomusicologists began increasingly to turn inward, to their own regional and, especially, historical traditions, and Europeanist ethnomusicology devolved into a constellation of national institutions, many espousing nationalist agendas'—*Music, Nationalism, and the Making of the New Europe*, xx. Bohlman writes of his own work as part of a return to Europe in ethnomusicology. Stokes – likewise – also writes of the growing interest in an ethnomusicology of Europe, asserting that the study of 'Europe 2', consisting of all the musics of Europe not associated with the Austro-German symphonic tradition and the positioning of Europe at the top of the world's cultural hierarchies, can do useful work in bridging divisions of labour between historical musicologists, popular music scholars, ethnologists and ethnomusicologists—'A Worldly Musicology', 836–37

Chapter 1

Locating National Phonography in the Literature

Although in the Introduction I spoke mostly about this thesis in relation to the history of ethnomusicology, it draws on several literatures, and in many ways doesn't have a disciplinary centre. Instead, it sits at the point where several branches of music studies – and non-music studies – overlap. This meeting point is where each field focuses on the study of recordings, and in this first chapter I present a review of the relevant literature.

Recorded music has been a burgeoning area of scholarship in the last decade, but field recording has been peripheral to this field. For much of its history, ethnomusicology has also been surprisingly quiet with regards to writing about the practices and consequences of field recording. This has been changing of late, but I argue that further work is needed on both the history and theorisation of ethnographic recordings. It is therefore useful to engage with work dealing with sound on a more general level – work increasingly being grouped together as sound studies – that offers different perspectives on recording. In so doing, it is possible to build towards a working understanding of phonography that can productively be applied to the ethnographic recording and archiving of musics. This is particularly useful to the study of folk music in Britain, which has yet to fully engage with the agencies of technologies in the production and circulation of national musics.

Recorded Music

The study of recorded music has a long history, but lately it has been growing in volume. Much of this work descends from the theorisations of technology and its impact on art and popular culture penned by Walter Benjamin and

Theodor Adorno, as they dwelt and disagreed on the ways in which technology had become embedded in the production of culture.¹ Recordings have played roles of varying significance in each of the fields of music studies, and they have also been the subject of more general historical writing. I begin by considering how such work has overwhelmingly focused on the recording studio at the expense of field recording.

Sound recording has been studied in great detail and from an array of perspectives. Professional accounts of sound recording include overviews from Aldred, Alkin, and Borwick, who survey production methods and techniques, but offer only the briefest mention of field recording as a means of adding sound effects to drama productions.² Other works are devoted to the practice of recording live music in clubs and concert halls, which, despite not describing themselves as such, could serve as technical manuals for field recording.³ We also now have numerous histories of sound recording – from Roland Gelatt, Oliver Read and Walter Welch, Michael Chanan, Timothy Day, David Morton, Jonathan Sterne, Greg Milner, Mark Katz, and Susan Schmidt-Horning – which are useful and illuminating, and offer some fleeting insights

¹ Most famously, Benjamin's essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanic Reproduction' (1936) in *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999), 211-44; and Adorno's 'The Form of the Phonograph Record' (1934), 'On the Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening' (1938), and 'On Popular Music' (1941), usefully gathered together in Adorno, *Essays on Music*, trans. Susan Gillespie (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002). See also Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J.M. Bernstein (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001). The long history of recorded music studies isn't *that* long, of course, given that sound recording was only invented in 1877 (albeit with a significant pre-history of technical and cultural precedents)

² John Aldred, *Manual of Sound Recording* (Watford: Fountain Press, 1978); Glyn Alkin, *Sound Recording and Reproduction* (Oxford: Focal Press, 1996); John Borwick, *Sound Recording* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994)

³ I'm thinking particularly of Bruce and Jenny Bartlett, *Recording Music on Location: Capturing the Live Performance* (Burlington, MA: Focus Press, 2007). See also, Gary Gottlieb and Paul Hennerich, *Recording on the Go: The Definitive Guide to Live Recording* (Boston, MA: Course Technology, 2009). Live recording is also covered in the trade press. See, for example, Paul White, 'Live Recording: Frequently Asked Questions', *Sound on Sound*, February 2000 –

<http://www.soundonsound.com/sos/feb00/articles/livefaq.htm>; and Matt Houghton, 'Recording a Live Show: How to get a Great-Sounding Gig Recording', *Sound on Sound*, November 2011 –

<http://www.soundonsound.com/sos/nov11/articles/recording-live-show.htm>. For a more theoretical perspective, see Paul Long, 'Warts and All: Recording the Live Music Experience' in *Coughing and Clapping: Investigating Audience Experience*, ed. Burland and Pitts (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 147-58

into the affordances and frustrations of field recording.⁴ Morton, for example, writes of the limitations of unwieldy early machines, which limited spontaneity, and were 'obtrusive, fragile, and in constant need of coddling'.⁵

Recent developments have seen the study of recorded music emerge as a subfield in its own right. The CHARM project (Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music), funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council and involving a partnership of several universities, ran between 2004 and 2009, with the goal of promoting 'the musicological study of recordings'.⁶ Related to the work of CHARM is the Art of Record Production (ARP) conference, launched in 2005 and taking place annually, followed in 2006 by a peer-reviewed online journal of the same name.⁷ Of these organisations, however, I think it's fair to say that CHARM was primarily concerned with recordings of Western classical music; while ARP remains very much focused on studio production. In both cases field recording barely makes a sound.⁸

This is reflected in a rapidly expanding literature on recorded music, in which field recordings remain largely out of disciplinary earshot. A wealth of

⁴ Roland Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph: The Story of the Gramophone from Tin Foil to High Fidelity* (London: Cassell, 1956); Oliver Read and Walter Welch, *From Tin Foil to Stereo: Evolution of the Phonograph* (Indianapolis, IN: H.W. Sams, 1959); Michael Chanan, *Repeated Takes: A Short History of Recording and its Effects on Music* (London: Verso, 1995); Timothy Day, *A Century of Recorded Music: Listening to Musical History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000); David Morton, *Off the Record: The Technology and Culture of Sound Recording in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000); Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Greg Milner, *Perfecting Sound Forever: The Story of Recorded Music* (London: Granta, 2009); Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology has Changed Music* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010); Susan Schmidt-Horning, *Chasing Sound: Technology, Culture, and the Art of Studio Recording from Edison to the LP* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013)

⁵ Morton, *Off the Record*, 147

⁶ <http://www.charm.rhul.ac.uk/index.html> CHARM researchers were awarded a further five years of funding in 2009, but shifted focus to the study of live music performance, through the Centre for Musical Performance as Creative Practice

⁷ <http://www.artofrecordproduction.com/index.php>

⁸ In addition to this, it can be argued that the CHARM project was actually more about the study of musical performance than of recordings. Recordings have been read as fairly transparent documents of performance styles, which could then be historicised and compared with current performance practices. The project thus raises questions about what a recording is, which is an issue of great relevance to the history of ethnographic recording, particularly in regard to the theoretical shift away from salvage fieldwork and towards the study of music in context, and how historical field recordings can be heard in relation to this shift

edited books has appeared recently.⁹ A name – phonomusicology – has even been suggested.¹⁰ But in most of these collections (some more than others), ethnomusicology is of marginal interest, and field recording is barely mentioned. (There are some important exceptions, which feature below.) This despite the important place of field recording in the history of popular music, with individuals such as Ralph Peer scouting out and making recordings of blues and folk musics in 1920s America, establishing markets and creating stars. Popular music studies, as a field, has been centred on – and arguably reliant upon – recordings and the recording industry from its inception in the 1980s, to the degree that recent work on the live music industry is heard as a corrective.¹¹ Yet discussion of the place of field recordings within the music industries has tended to come from elsewhere.¹²

Perhaps the lack of attention paid to field recordings in recorded music studies has been because recording studios – the technologies and social practices they contain – are so fantastically interesting, such fertile sites for analysis, so rich with interpretive opportunity and metaphor. Particularly when they are written about with such verve as in the work of Evan Eisenberg, for whom ‘the glass booths and baffles that isolate the musician from his [sic] fellow musicians; the abstracted audience; the sense of producing an object and of mass-producing a commodity; the deconstruction of time by takes and

⁹ Mine Doğantan-Dack, ed. *Recorded Music: Philosophical and Critical Reflections* (London: Middlesex University Press, 2008); Nicholas Cook et al, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Amanda Bayley, ed. *Recorded Music: Performance, Culture and Technology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Simon Frith and Simon Zagorski-Thomas, ed. *The Art of Record Production: An Introductory Reader for a New Academic Field* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012)

¹⁰ Stephen Cottrell, ‘The Rise and Rise of Phonomusicology’ in *Recorded Music: Performance, Culture and Technology*, ed. Amanda Bayley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 15-36

¹¹ Simon Frith et al, *The History of Live Music in Britain, Volume 1: 1950-1967, From Dance Hall to the 100 Club* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013)

¹² Kay Kaufman Shelemay, ‘Recording Technology, the Record Industry, and Ethnomusicological Scholarship’ in *Comparative Musicology and Anthropology of Music*, ed. Nettl and Bohlman (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 277-92; Stephen Cottrell, ‘Ethnomusicology and the Music Industries: An Overview’, *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 19: 1 (2010), 3-25; Hugo Zemp, ‘The/An Ethnomusicologist and the Record Business’, *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 28 (1996), 36-56

its reconstruction by splicing—these are strong metaphors of modern life'.¹³ But one consequence of leaving field recordings out of conversations about record production is that they could be heard as not being *produced* at all.

Nevertheless, this literature is useful in thinking about recording generally, and it offers many insights that hold true for field recording. Mark Katz, for instance, writes that the 'discourse of realism' in recording ignores a crucial point: 'recorded sound is *mediated* sound'.¹⁴ While for James Barrett: 'where the reception of musical performance is mediated through recording technology the listening experience has been humanly organised by the controllers of the recording and production process'.¹⁵ Both of these assertions, I'd argue, are entirely applicable to field recording; and such ideas have begun to make some headway in discussions of recording in ethnomusicology.

Ethnomusicology, Technology, History

The place of recording technology in ethnomusicology has only relatively recently come to prominence on the disciplinary agenda. The same has been said of technology generally. Writing in 2003, René Lysloff and Leslie Gay playfully recalled their efforts in the mid-1990s to foster discussions on music and technoculture. 'Our purpose in arguing for an ethnomusicology of technoculture was to break from past conventions of examining only folkish or high art "traditions" of music ... researchers and their ethnographic Others have both long fully embraced media technology—lock, stock, and circuit board'.¹⁶ By showing how technology implicates cultural practices involving music, they sought to overcome the 'conventional distinction, even conflict, between technology and culture, implicit especially in studies of "traditional" musics in the field of ethnomusicology'.¹⁷ In so doing, they drew upon other

¹³ Evan Eisenberg, *The Recording Angel: Music, Records and Culture from Aristotle to Zappa* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005[1987]), 130

¹⁴ Katz, *Capturing Sound*, 2. Original emphasis

¹⁵ James Barrett, 'Producing Performance' in *Recorded Music*, ed. Amanda Bayley, 100

¹⁶ René Lysloff and Leslie Gay, 'Introduction: Ethnomusicology in the Twenty-First Century' in Lysloff and Gay, ed. *Music and Technoculture* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 1-2

¹⁷ Lysloff and Gay, 'Ethnomusicology in the Twenty-First Century', 3

fields of study, including popular music studies; and last couple of decades have seen a growing interest in technologies, popular musics and the recording industries in the ethnomusicological present, as well as in the discipline's own history.

Several studies focused on technology and fieldwork emerged during this same millennial period. The writings of Thomas Porcello, Timothy Taylor, Louise Meintjes, and Paul Greene have asked questions of ethnographic representation in relation to technology.¹⁸ Perhaps the most important voice on technology and ethnography has been that of Steven Feld, for whom the often-shoddy quality with which field recordings are produced is detrimental to those recorded.¹⁹ But recent meditations on the politics of technologies should not suggest that these are new issues. Ethnomusicology has always been about technology, as has its predecessor, comparative musicology. And although the relationship between recording machine, fieldworker, archive, research subject, and knowledge production has been constantly in flux, the politics of recording has been ever present.

Eric Ames writes of comparative musicology as 'the first discipline based on sound recordings', in a study describing the phonograph's role in turn-of-the-century ideas on time and its excavation, primitivism, and evolution.²⁰ Similarly, Bruno Nettl argues that 'the importance of sound recording to the development of ethnomusicology cannot be overestimated'.²¹ The politics of technologies, and the technological privilege of the researcher, have, however, only recently been considered.

¹⁸ Thomas Porcello, "'Tails out': Social Phenomenology and the Ethnographic Representation of Technology in Music Making', *Ethnomusicology*, 42: 3 (1998), 485-510; Timothy Taylor, *Strange Sounds: Music, Technology and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Louise Meintjes, *Sound of Africa!: Making Music Zulu in a South African Studio* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Paul Greene and Thomas Porcello, ed. *Wired for Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005)

¹⁹ Steven Feld, 'From Schizophonia to Schismogenesis: On the Discourses and Commodification Practices of "World Music" and "World Beat" in *Music Grooves: Essays and Dialogues*, ed. Keil and Feld (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 257-89; Steven Feld and Donald Brenneis, 'Doing Anthropology in Sound', *American Ethnologist*, 31:4 (2004), 461-74

²⁰ Eric Ames, 'The Sound of Evolution', *Modernism/Modernity*, 10: 2 (2003), 297-325

²¹ Bruno Nettl, *Theory and Method in Ethnomusicology* (London: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), 17

Such privilege, for Lysloff and Gay, has been taken for granted in the writings of ethnomusicologists, while recording technologies have been 'tacitly regarded as culturally neutral by most scholars'.²² This is born out, for example, in a manual for fieldworkers published by the IFMC in 1958.²³ Power disappears through such claims to objectivity. Despite its links with colonialism becoming less direct, ethnomusicology has still been painted as part of a colonial quest, wherein the power to 'save' musics considered 'exotic', and to authenticate them in the process, comes through access to and control of technology.²⁴

The current thesis sits within a broader move to reassess the histories of field recording, and to think critically about the legacies housed in sound archives. Earlier work of a similar vein is influential here. Bruno Nettl and Philip Bohlman edited an important collection of essays on the history of ethnomusicology and its disciplinary forebears in 1991.²⁵ Timothy Cooley wrote of the 'decidedly negative impact' that ethnomusicological fieldwork can sometimes have on those studied.²⁶ Studies examining the ethics of fieldwork have proliferated, including *Shadows in the Field*, edited by Cooley and Gregory Barz.²⁷ And the number of case studies examining histories of fieldwork has been expanding.

Erika Brady wrote of the effects of the phonograph on ethnographic fieldwork in North America in the late 19th century, describing how recording technology at once profoundly altered the relationships between fieldworker and subject, while at the same time reinforcing existing anthropological

²² Lysloff and Gay, 'Ethnomusicology in the Twenty-First Century', 3

²³ Maud Karpeles, ed. *The Collecting of Folk Music and other Ethnomusicological Material* (London: International Folk Music Council and the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 1958)

²⁴ Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990), 146-54

²⁵ Bruno Nettl and Philip Bohlman, ed. *Comparative Musicology and Anthropology of Music: Essays on the History of Ethnomusicology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991)

²⁶ Timothy Cooley, 'Preface', *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, 12: 1 (2003), v-vi

²⁷ Gregory Barz and Timothy Cooley, *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). The first edition of *Shadows in the Field* was published in 1997

assumptions and prejudices.²⁸ Michael Taussig also writes of this period of early recording, showing how the phonograph was used as part of colonial staging through which difference was exaggerated, but also how colonised peoples sought to appropriate this technology of appropriation, with inevitably complex effects.²⁹ Robert Reigle – in one of the volumes on recorded music mentioned above – offers a more upbeat account of the history of field recording, positing the humanistic motivations behind recording, and crediting recordings with contributing to the shift from evolutionary theories of music to relativistic standpoints.³⁰ Reigle offers a useful overview of the ways in which world music has been disseminated, as do René van Peer, and Travis Jackson.³¹

Noel Lobley – in a thesis on Hugh Tracey's recording project, *The Sound of Africa*, and the attempt to get archived recordings of Xhosa music back into the urban Xhosa community of Grahamstown, South Africa – argued in 2010 that the production and use of field recordings in ethnomusicology has been under-theorised, stating that it is vital to analyse the fieldworker's role in the creation of sound objects. He asserts the need to think about what makes recordings 'ethnographic' as opposed to documentary or commercial, and issues a call to establish a debate on 'recording culture' (with reference to Clifford and Marcus's ground-breaking work in anthropology, *Writing Culture*).³² Lobley's ideas on recordings resonate strongly with my own, and

²⁸ Erika Brady, *A Spiral Way: How the Phonograph Changed Ethnography* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1999)

²⁹ Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993)

³⁰ Robert Reigle, 'Humanistic Motivations in Ethnomusicological Recordings' in *Recorded Music: Philosophical and Critical Reflections*, ed. Mine Doğantan-Dack, 189-210. Other chapters on ethnomusicology in the recent collections on recorded music include: John Baily, 'Modi Operandi in the Making of "World Music" Recordings' in *Recorded Music*, ed. Bayley, 107-24; and Jonathan Stock, 'Recordings as Research Tools in Ethnomusicology' in *Recorded Music*, ed. Bayley, 206-24

³¹ René van Peer, 'Taking the World for a Spin in Europe: An Insider's Look at the World Music Recording Business', *Ethnomusicology*, 43: 2 (1999), 374-84; Travis Jackson, 'Disseminating World Music' in *The Cambridge History of World Music*, ed. Philip Bohlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 705-25

³² Noel Lobley, 'The Social Biography of Ethnomusicological Field Recordings: Eliciting Responses to Hugh Tracey's *The Sound of Africa* Series', DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2010; James Clifford and George Marcus, ed. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986)

his work has been useful and influential. It has also been included in a special issue of *Ethnomusicology Forum*, edited by Carolyn Landau and Janet Topp Fargion, alongside half a dozen other studies of repatriation projects, with the intention of developing methodologies for a more equitable discipline.³³

The essays gathered in the *Cambridge History of World Music*, edited by Philip Bohlman, provide immense detail and description of how technology has always been on the scene at the moments when various world musics have become history. Indeed this volume gives history to world music (at last).³⁴ Bohlman's introduction gives much attention to technology and recording, writing that 'those employing technology recalibrate the relation of music to time, making it possible to represent and describe music in new ways, with speech or images about music, which combine to create discourse about music'.³⁵ And although world music tends to operate through a binary of the West and the rest, I'd argue that many of these same logics apply to musics that have been subjected to forms of primitivism within Europe—usually positioned as being suspended in cultural stasis until their 'discovery'.

Elsewhere, a literature has also been steadily developing on sound archives: not only on the particulars of particular collections, but on their plights and potentials, and on the possible futures of archival holdings. Preeminent in this field is Anthony Seeger, who has directed scholarly archives and curated commercial projects (at the Archives of Traditional Music at Indiana University, and Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, respectively). Seeger has consistently foregrounded the ethics of recording and repatriation, advocating for cultural self-determination and the role of archival recordings therein.³⁶ At times, however, good politics can elide the

³³ Carolyn Landau and Janet Topp Fargion, ed. 'Ethnomusicology, Archives and Communities: Methodologies for an Equitable Discipline', *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 21: 2 (2012)

³⁴ Philip Bohlman, ed. *The Cambridge History of World Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013)

³⁵ Philip Bohlman, 'Introduction: World Music's Histories' in *The Cambridge History of World Music*, ed. Bohlman, 6

³⁶ Anthony Seeger, 'The Role of Sound Archives in Ethnomusicology Today', *Ethnomusicology*, 30:2 (1986), 261-76; 'After the Alligator Swallows your Microphone: the Future (?) of Field Recordings' in *Essays in Honor of Frank J. Gillis*, ed. Nancy McEntire (Bloomington, IN: Ethnomusicology Publications Group, 1991), 37-49; 'Archives as Part of Community Traditions' in *Music Archiving in the World: Papers Presented at the Conference on the Occasion of the 100th Anniversary of the Berliner*

production processes involved in making recordings. Seeger and Shubha Chaudhuri, contrasting recordings with written fieldwork documents, assert that, through recording, 'non-literate people can speak for themselves, events are captured without the bias of the writer and certain phenomena that almost completely escape the written word can be fully documented, such as dance and music'.³⁷

This discourse of transparency and neutrality is something I argue against in the following chapters. Yet I also argue that what field recordings *are* is up to those communities in which they were made in the first place. In this regard, the essays contained in Seeger and Chaudhuri's collection, *Archives for the Future*, as well as those gathered in Gabriele Berlin and Artur Simon's *Music Archiving in the World*, are valuable in detailing recent work of digitisation and dissemination, agency and advocacy.³⁸ Yet I *also* argue that issues of repatriation differ when performed within Western societies, when it's often not clear exactly to whom recordings are being returned upon their recirculation. So as well as drawing on ethnomusicological approaches, it's necessary to listen elsewhere.

Defining Phonography

If the search for literature on field recording is expanded beyond that concerned with folk and world musics, a host of other meanings and ideas become apparent. Field recording also refers to practices of recording wildlife and natural history sounds, soundscape productions, the use of found sounds in sound art compositions, and more. And writing on these practices is increasingly being gathered together under the rubric of sound studies. I don't offer a comprehensive review of the sound studies literature on recording here, but I suggest that there are connections between each of these

Phonogramm-Archiv, ed. Berlin and Simon (Berlin: VWB – Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung, 2002), 41-47

³⁷ Anthony Seeger and Shubha Chaudhuri, 'Archives and the Future' in *Archives for the Future: Global Perspectives on Audiovisual Archives in the 21st Century*, ed. Seeger and Chaudhuri (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2004), 2-3

³⁸ Seeger and Chaudhuri, ed. *Archives for the Future: Global Perspectives on Audiovisual Archives in the 21st Century* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2004); Berlin and Simon, ed. *Music Archiving in the World: Papers Presented at the Conference on the Occasion of the 100th Anniversary of the Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv* (Berlin: VWB – Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung, 2002)

recording practices, and that ideas stemming from such work can productively be applied to theories of ethnographic recording. Particularly, concepts of phonography can be used to make sense of the creativity and production involved in all forms of field recording.

For instance, Ernst Karel writes of location recording – a term he prefers to field recording – as ‘not a matter of capturing a sound that was there—it’s a matter of making the microphones do something interesting’.³⁹ This is an engaging idea, especially if we consider it in relation to the advice on making recordings published by the IFMC in 1958:

In recording an ensemble, start with a general recording of the whole piece, or a representative section of it, and then, without stopping the machine, move the microphone near each performer, or group of performers, in turn. The object is to give prominence to each contributing element whilst still allowing the complete ensemble to be heard in the background.⁴⁰

Although these methods were encouraged to assist subsequent analysis of the music (recalling the earlier division of labour of comparative musicology, wherein the field collector would provide data for expert analysis in academies and laboratories elsewhere), they also show how concern for the microphone and its positioning were central to ethnomusicological recording endeavours.⁴¹ Knowledge production came through analysis, which was reliant upon technology. This may seem completely obvious, but it is exactly this concern for technology and production that often goes missing in discourses of recording folk musics, which emphasise fidelity, transparency, and verisimilitude.

In this regard, Jonathan Sterne’s history of the origins of sound reproduction is of great help in explaining how recording has never been

³⁹ Ernst Karel in Marc Masters and Grayson Currin, ‘Turning the World into Art’, *Pitchfork*, 21/10/2011 – <http://pitchfork.com/features/the-out-door/8692-field-recording/>

⁴⁰ Karpeles, *The Collecting of Folk Music*, 21

⁴¹ On the division of labour in comparative musicology, and how it explains a lack of reflection on fieldwork practices before World War II, see Loble, ‘The Social Biography of Ethnomusicological Field Recordings’, 39–43

about capturing existing sounds, but always about getting people (or other sounding entities) to make sounds specifically for machines.⁴² Sterne extends arguments made by James Lastra, who challenges the belief that invests 'original' sounds with an uncomplicated purity, and hears 'copies' as degraded representations of reality.⁴³ And all of these ideas feed into what is probably the most detailed consideration of field recording to date: Mitchell Akiyama's dissertation on 'The Phonographic Memory'.⁴⁴

Akiyama also challenges the assumption that field recordings are faithful capturings of sound and place – things as they were – that revolve around the notion of presence in the field, or 'being there'. He does so by listening to uses of field recording across four disciplines: ethnography, biology, acoustic ecology, and sound art. Encountering themes of transparency and authenticity in each field, Akiyama's work offers a model of thinking about recording as a form of intervention that constructs its objects, rather than the mimetic reflection of an original phenomenon.⁴⁵ Invoking Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, he asserts that presence is interruption.⁴⁶ And he traces the history that has created a binary between field and studio. The line between the two is, for Akiyama, largely fictitious and contingent: a development of the Victorian era, glossing how the laboratory was present in the field and vice versa.

Moreover, he considers how definitions of field recording are hard to come by. Or if they are offered, field recording is always defined *against* the studio or laboratory. Thus, if studios are about techniques of modern control, creating ideal sounds, and removing the contingencies of place and space, then 'the field' is the opposite: uncontrolled sonic environments, real locations, and capturing them in their full complexity.⁴⁷ But field recording is about staging, about the logics of studio practices, about recordists 'intervening in the spontaneous flow of the world in order to extract what they wanted from what

⁴² Sterne, *The Audible Past*, passim

⁴³ James Lastra, *Sound Technology and American Cinema*: (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000)

⁴⁴ Mitchell Akiyama, 'The Phonographic Memory: A History of Sound Recording in the Field', PhD thesis, McGill University, 2014

⁴⁵ Akiyama, 'The Phonographic Memory', 57-58

⁴⁶ Akiyama, 'The Phonographic Memory', 4-5

⁴⁷ Akiyama, 'The Phonographic Memory', 5, 26

they were given'.⁴⁸ Ultimately, the field is not a categorical a priori, but 'the shadow cast by the laboratory as it emerged in the nineteenth century'.⁴⁹

Ethnographic recording in postwar Europe was saturated with discourse that placed field recordings as the authentic counterparts to the artifice of the studio, so Akiyama's histories are incredibly useful in questioning this binary. They also speak to the potential benefits of bringing work from sound studies to bear on histories of musical fieldwork. Sound studies and ethnomusicology are already in dialogue, however, and the coalescence and emergence of the former field has provoked some polarised responses in the latter. For example, Steven Feld: 'I hate sound studies! It totalises the object "sound", and it presumes an imagined coherence to that object that one is supposed to know in advance. Who and what is served by that? More financial and managerial interests than intellectual ones, I think. It's a perfect microcosm of neoliberal education'.⁵⁰ In the other corner, Deborah Wong has renounced music, arguing that it is a historical and ideological construct that grants music an autonomous space in society and therefore works against ethnomusicological aims: 'I choose to leave music behind, and will stop rerouting my projects to wrestle music into centre place ... I will follow the trail of sound, noise, and silence, which makes powerfully audible the questions I find most important'.⁵¹ It is likely that these debates will grow in intensity over the coming years.

In any case, I'd argue that perspectives on sound can productively be applied to questions of music, regardless of disciplinary politics (also acknowledging that music and sound are far from discrete phenomena). And I'd like to close this section by briefly discussing the concept of phonography as a means of tying together all the approaches mentioned so far. Phonography, like field recording, has multiple connotations and definitions.

⁴⁸ Akiyama, 'The Phonographic Memory', 14. Likewise, the studio sound as placeless trope doesn't explain why some recording studios are fetishised for their sound—Akiyama, 'The Phonographic Memory', 30

⁴⁹ Akiyama, 'The Phonographic Memory', 8

⁵⁰ Steven Feld in Feld and Panayotis Panopoulos, 'Athens Conversation: On Ethnographic Listening and Comparative Acoustemologies', 2015 – <http://www.stevenfeld.net/interviews/>

⁵¹ Deborah Wong, 'Sound, Silence, Music: Power', *Ethnomusicology*, 58: 2 (2014), 351-52

It tends to be associated with creative compositional practices that utilise field recordings in sound art, suggesting a degree of artistry as much as documentary. But it is a term originally used in 1840 by Isaac Pitman to describe a system of shorthand stenography, using signs to represent verbal sounds.⁵² On a more general level, phonography simply means 'sound writing' or 'writing with sound'. Evan Eisenberg has applied the term to recorded music, positing phonography as an art form rather than merely a medium, and defining it as 'music created in the process of recording'.⁵³ 'Pure phonography', for Eisenberg, is a 'pure studio product'; but he acknowledges that phonography can also be performed in the field. He places John Hammond – the American record producer who worked with Aretha Franklin, Charlie Christian, Billie Holiday, Bob Dylan and many others – at the centre of field phonography, writing that Hammond was not looking for typical performances but exceptional ones, thus turning folk music into art music through his sound writing (whereas his 'bad colleagues', by taking the typical and making it rigid, turned it into popular music).⁵⁴

Elsewhere, Rothenbuhler and Peters have explicitly attempted to define phonography. They treat it as belonging to a distinct time period pertaining to analogue recording formats, grounded in the materialities of cylinders, discs, and tape.⁵⁵ And although their piece becomes a love letter to the LP and a diatribe against the digital, and although there's much that I disagree with (not least the notion that analogue technologies are closer to nature), there are also some useful ideas. Namely, the authors insist that we take the *graphy* part of the term seriously, asserting that 'phonography offers something like handwriting, with its tracing of the quirks of the author's body'.⁵⁶ This is an idea that I run with in the following chapters, reformulating it to argue that

⁵² Isaac Pitman, *Phonography or Writing by Sound: A Natural Method of Writing all Languages by One Alphabet, Composed of Signs that Represent the Sounds of the Human Voice: Adapted also to the English Language as a Complete System of Short Hand, Briefer than any other System, and by which a Speaker can be Followed Verbatim, without the use of Arbitrary Marks* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1840)

⁵³ Eisenberg, *The Recording Angel*, 93, 196-97

⁵⁴ Eisenberg, *The Recording Angel*, 90, 102

⁵⁵ Eric Rothenbuhler and John Durham Peters, 'Defining Phonography: An Experiment in Theory', *The Musical Quarterly*, 81: 2 (1997), 242-64

⁵⁶ Rothenbuhler and Peters, 'Defining Phonography', 259

recordists are present in their recordings, and that they continue to speak through them as they circulate.

No doubt there are more definitions of phonography. (It's also the title of a Britney Spears song from 2008: 'And I make no apologies; I'm into phonography'.) But I'd suggest that the simplest definition is perhaps the most useful. Writing sound: the use of technology to organise and inscribe social practices and sonic phenomena. This is the formulation of phonography I work with in this thesis, believing that it highlights the creativity and agency involved in the production of recording, which in turn highlights the ethical and political issues of using the sounds of others as a source material. The politics of appropriation have been much discussed in studies of folk music in Britain, but less has been said about recording technologies and practices of field recording.

Applying this to Folk Musics in Britain

The study of British folk musics has largely fallen into the cracks between historical musicology, popular music studies, and ethnomusicology in music studies in the UK. Only a small number of academic institutions offer teaching specialisms in traditional musics, and 'folk music studies', as an area of research, has tended to inhabit pockets of space across disciplines, rather than cohering as one in itself. A substantial literature has nonetheless developed, much of it concerned with histories of collecting, folk revival, and the politics of culture. Yet very little has focused on field recording. Nor has enough been said about what kind of 'Britain' has been represented in folk collecting, particularly in relation to colonial history. The final section of this chapter places field recording into these literatures.

There was an earlier field recording moment in England, long before World War II. The phonograph was trialled by several collectors involved in the work of the Folk Song Society in the early years of the twentieth century, most famously by Percy Grainger. Grainger published a seminal article in 1908 on his experiences of 'collecting with the phonograph'.⁵⁷ This moment differs

⁵⁷ Percy Grainger, 'Collecting with the Phonograph', *Journal of the Folk Song Society*, 12 (1908), 147-69

from the postwar one, however, in that recording was rejected as a collecting method by the Society at large, and this has since been discussed by Michael Yates, C.J. Bearman, and Graham Freeman.⁵⁸ I also touch upon this in the next chapter. This rejection means that not much can be said of field recording practices in the first half of the century, but fieldwork more generally in this period has generated a great amount of discussion.

Two studies stand out as having triggered these debates: Dave Harker's *Fakesong*, published in 1985; and Georgina Boyes's *The Imagined Village*, published in 1993.⁵⁹ Both offer critical readings of the ways in which revival movements have expropriated and repackaged – or even invented from scratch – certain forms of expressive culture, as an upper-class intervention into what was heard as vulgar popular culture. Cecil Sharp often comes in for particular criticism, and he has been defended – and Harker and Boyes refuted – by Bearman and by David Gregory. Gregory argues that 'what the collectors noted down was authentic', and that 'as early as the 1870s we find texts and tunes printed together with complete fidelity'; while Bearman, perhaps taking the accusations of 'fake' and 'imagined' cultures too literally, conducts statistical analysis to prove that most of those from whom Sharp collected were indeed agricultural labourers, and that this validates his theories on cultural isolation and collective identity.⁶⁰

The tone of the debate has been bitter, and has created an impasse between the folk and the fake. One of the things I've been expressly keen to do with this thesis is not get bogged down in picking sides. Instead, by focusing on production I attempt to show how traditions have been brought into being through field recording and archiving. Highlighting production does

⁵⁸ Michael Yates, 'Percy Grainger and the Impact of the Phonograph', *Folk Music Journal*, 4: 3 (1982), 265-275; C.J. Bearman, 'Percy Grainger, the Phonograph, and the Folk Song Society', *Music & Letters*, 84: 3 (2003), 434-55; Graham Freeman, "'It Wants All the Creases Ironing Out": Percy Grainger, the Folk Song Society, and the Ideology of the Archive', *Music & Letters*, 92: 3 (2011), 410-36

⁵⁹ Dave Harker, *Fakesong: The Manufacture of British 'Folksong', 1700 to the Present Day* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985); Georgina Boyes, *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology and the English Folk Revival* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993)

⁶⁰ David Gregory, 'Fakesong in an Imagined Village? A Critique of the Harker-Boyes Thesis', *Canadian Folk Music*, 43: 3 (2009), 18-26; C.J. Bearman, 'Who Were the Folk? The Demography of Cecil Sharp's Somerset Folk Singers', *The Historical Journal*, 43: 3 (2000), 751-75

not make these musics any less real, but aims to show that recording produces realities.⁶¹ (I'd argue that recording is about as real as it gets—made from a mess of agencies, medialities, contingencies.) It is interesting that both Harker's and Boyes's studies hear recording as the remedy to the malpractices of revivalist misrepresentation. Harker credits Percy Grainger for reducing mediation through his use of the phonograph. While Boyes curiously negates the arguments she makes very well through the rest of her book by championing the ability of postwar recording technologies to reach and capture the voices of the folk, who apparently did exist all along.⁶²

The situation has perhaps been less acrimonious in Scotland. Field recording has been tucked into histories of revival and folk culture.⁶³ It is central to the discipline of ethnology in Scotland, which has recently seen the completion of a fourteen-volume *Compendium of Scottish Ethnology*.⁶⁴ And a literature has developed in relation to the history of the School of Scottish Studies, which I draw upon in Chapter Three.⁶⁵ Much of this has been published to commemorate recent anniversaries of the School, and is often explicitly celebratory in tone. While this work is informative and useful, it also

⁶¹ John Law and John Urry, 'Enacting the Social', *Economy and Society*, 33: 3 (2004), 395

⁶² Harker, *Fakesong*, 207-08; Boyes, *The Imagined Village*, 211-12

⁶³ Ailie Munro, *The Democratic Muse: Folk Music Revival in Scotland* (London: Kahn & Averill, 1984); Edward Cowan, ed. *The People's Past: Scottish Folk, Scottish History*, (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1980); Gary West, *Voicing Scotland: Folk, Culture, Nation* (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2012)

⁶⁴ The fourteen volumes have been published by Birlinn in Edinburgh

⁶⁵ Ailie Munro, 'The Role of the School of Scottish Studies in the Folk Music Revival', *Folk Music Journal*, 6:2 (1991), 132-68; Margaret Mackay, 'The First Sixty Years of the School of Scottish Studies: An Overview' in *The Carrying Stream Flows On: Celebrating the Diamond Jubilee of the School of Scottish Studies*, ed. Bob Chambers (Isle of Lewis: Islands Book Trust, 2013), 1-33; Alexander Fenton and Margaret Mackay, 'A History of Ethnology in Scotland', in *A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology: An Introduction to Scottish Ethnology*, ed. Fenton and Mackay (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2013), 49-70; Cathlin Macaulay, 'The School of Scottish Studies Archives', *Scottish Archives*, 12 (2006), 81-94; John MacInnes, 'Reminiscences of the School of Scottish Studies of the University of Edinburgh' in *'A Guid Hairst': Collecting and Archiving Scottish Tradition*, ed. Katherine Campbell et al (Maastricht: Shaker Publishing, 2013), 229-38

opens up space for more critical interpretations of this history, which has begun to be filled.⁶⁶

Some have focused on recordings more directly. Kenneth Goldstein offers an assessment of the impact of recording technologies on the British folksong revival, and his foregrounding of technology results in a different telling of history.⁶⁷ In this account, technologies – from movable type to phonograph records – trigger revivals. But Goldstein's account is self-confessedly one of technological determinism, and he writes that recordings represent 'objective data', thus bypassing any discussion of how recordings are produced in the field.⁶⁸ Others write histories of revival in which field recordings are barely present.⁶⁹

A number of studies have covered some of the same ground that I cover in this thesis. David Gregory has written on Alan Lomax's work in Britain, and on the BBC Folk Music and Dialect Recording Scheme.⁷⁰ Gregory's research is excellent in its detailing of the movements of recordists, and his article on Lomax offers some analysis of his work in broadcasting and the recording industry. Yet his writing centres on the issue of whether or not Lomax and his colleagues made the revival 'better' or not, treating revival as though it were some solid, clearly defined and demarcated entity, and making pronouncements on the quality of the work from a position seemingly still invested in the revivalist project. This is even more the case with Gregory's writing on the BBC Scheme, which again is meticulous in detailing what was recorded, but celebrates those recordings without really asking how, or why, they were made. Ultimately, his binary conclusion – that fieldworkers and their

⁶⁶ Fraser MacDonald, 'Doomsday Fieldwork, or, How to Rescue Gaelic Culture? The Salvage Paradigm in Geography, Archaeology, and Folklore, 1955-62', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 29 (2011), 309-35

⁶⁷ Kenneth Goldstein, 'The Impact of Recording Technology on the British Folksong Revival' in *Folk Music and Modern Sound*, ed. Ferris and Hart (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1982), 3-13

⁶⁸ Goldstein, 'The Impact of Recording Technology', 12-13

⁶⁹ Michael Brocken, *The British Folk Revival, 1944-2002* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003)

⁷⁰ E. David Gregory, 'Lomax in London: Alan Lomax, the BBC and the Folk-Song Revival in England, 1950-1958', *Folk Music Journal*, 8: 2 (2002), 136-69; E. David Gregory, 'Roving Out: Peter Kennedy and the BBC Folk Music and Dialect Recording Scheme, 1952-1957', in *Folk Song: Tradition, Revival, and Re-Creation*, ed. Ian Russell and David Atkinson (Aberdeen: The Elphinstone Institute, 2004), 218-40

field recordings are good, while the BBC and its outputs are bad – only gets us so far.

John Szwed has written a biography on Lomax, but his coverage of Lomax's time in Britain is based on Gregory's work.⁷¹ And a small number of studies add further interpretation to Lomax's work in Scotland.⁷² Yet my opinion is that British folk music studies has yet to seriously engage with field recording, in relation to the politics of technologies, the agencies of recorded sound, and the ways it has been used to produce national musics. Nor has it asked questions of how Britain – or England and Scotland – has been delimited, absencing colonial history and its effects on the imperial centre. Scholarship on folk music in Britain has largely re-performed, and validated, groupings of the past, even when criticising collecting practices.

In this chapter I have considered field recording in relation to several literatures. What I attempt to do over the coming chapters builds on these literatures. I attempt to incorporate current theoretical discussions on sound recording into studies of folk musics in Britain. I ask what British music is, arguing that we should acknowledge that the production of national musics denies Britain's transnational history. I seek to add case studies to the history of ethnomusicology. And I hope to contribute to understandings of the sound archive. More histories are needed, and this all begins with history.

⁷¹ John Szwed, *The Man Who Recorded the World: A Biography of Alan Lomax* (London: Heinemann, 2010)

⁷² Ewan McVicar, "'Dunking their Heels in the Corn and Custard:' About Alan Lomax in Scotland in *'Tis Sixty Years Since: The 1951 Edinburgh People's Festival Ceilidh and the Scottish Folk Revival*, ed. Eberhard Bort (Ochertyre: Grace Notes, 2011), 45-59; Dale Carter, 'Contested Grounds: Alan Lomax, John Lorne Campbell and the Scottish Folk Revival', *Review of Scottish Culture*, 26 (2014), 4-24

Chapter 2

Delimiting the Nation:

A Sound Picture of Great Britain

Introduction

This chapter listens to two examples of national phonography that were contemporary with the field recording moment, and help to explain its emergence: *A Sound Picture of Great Britain*, and the mid-century recording output of the English Folk Dance and Song Century. Both were operations run from London, and tell us much about the ways in which the nation was being conceptualised after World War II and the cultural currents from which national recording projects and archiving practices emerged. They were the products of a reduced nationness and territorial remapping that came with the end of empire, and employed conservative notions of tradition to secure national identity.

This chapter also discusses the work of the International Folk Music Council, which shared and encouraged these conservative notions of tradition, facilitating recorded exchanges of purified nations in the name of peace building. It draws upon several sources: listening to the sound recordings that were produced for the 1951 Festival of Britain; archival research involving reading all the minutes of English Folk Dance and Song Society committee meetings between 1945 and 1958; working through the journal published by the International Folk Music Council from its first issue in 1949; and reading literature on post-colonialism, British postwar culture and pastoralism, noise and technology.

Focus here is mostly on England, and the attempts from London-based projects and institutions to define and delimit the nation in sound. Institutional leaders and social elites were sometimes content to hear the nation as just England, but at other times sought to stretch their sense of national identity

across the British Isles, shifting between modes to suit the needs at hand. I make no effort to reconcile these contradictions, instead exploring the messy ways in which centralised institutions sought to impose a sound culture onto the sound cultures of others. Hearing these recordings as forms of inclusion and exclusion, noise abatement, and technological delegation, this chapter traces how they, at once, catalysed the field recording moment through their ethnographic inadequacy, and set the tone for its development by delimiting the nation.

A Sound Picture of Great Britain

A Sound Picture of Great Britain – produced for the 1951 Festival of Britain by the Festival organisers and released through HMV – is a whistle-stop audio tour of the British Isles, the geography of the nation mapped onto two sides of a 78rpm disc. The tour begins in London; I hear first the auditory landmark of the chimes of Big Ben. A narrator enters, informing me that the next sound I'm to hear is the voice of King George VI, opening the Festival of Britain from the steps of St Paul's Cathedral. The King's voice is closely recorded and clear enough. He speaks of welcoming visitors who have 'come to see what this old country can do', of turning modern knowledge from destructive to peaceful ends, and of lifting people to greater happiness as the century develops.

Then the narrator again: 'to the visitor returning home for the Festival of Britain, to the exile who perhaps hasn't seen Britain for many years, the sounds that form part of the life of these islands are but memories'. The voice I hear is of BBC announcer David Lloyd James, wielding finest mid-century Received Pronunciation. It continues: 'Let's try to recapture some of these memories—memories of work, sporting events, and pageantry'. A lone military voice shouts, and I'm informed I'm an earwitness to the annual ceremony of 'Trooping the Colour', in honour of the King's official birthday. The narrator then whisks me through central London, 'down Whitehall, past the Cenotaph, past 10 Downing Street – the home of the Prime Minister – to Westminster, where the bells of Westminster Abbey merge with the chimes of Big Ben over the Houses of Parliament'. The bells fade in from beneath the narration, chiming polyrhythms. Then I'm off again, 'north to Trafalgar Square, eastward

along the Strand and Fleet Street, past St Paul's Cathedral and the Mansion House, to His Majesty's Tower of London—that ancient fortress, which for eight-and-a-half centuries has guarded the river Thames and the City of London'. I hear the 'Ceremony of the Keys': more military shouting, and a brass band playing the 'Last Post'.

So far, so elite. But my sonic imagination is then cast out onto the river. The close of the 'Last Post' is joined in antiphonic montage by the honking of tugboats, which in turn segue into the closing bars of Peter Dawson singing 'Old Father Thames'. The tone shifts further as I'm delivered 'to the comparative gloom of noisy Euston station'—accompanied by amplified train announcements, the stampede of commuters, and a train departing. Before I know it, my guide informs me that 'next morning we're in Glasgow—that great Scottish port on the Clyde'. I'm told of the city's shipbuilding industry, and am served an illustration of this not through the sounds of shipbuilders, but of Princess Elizabeth blessing the luxury liner *Coronia*.

'When the ship worker, or for that matter any other Scottish worker, seeks recreation, the answer is usually Association Football'. I am told of the annual match between Scotland and England, and of the famous 'Hampden roar' – the product of 150,000 throats in Hampden Park stadium in Glasgow – that proceeds to roar into my ears. 'East from Glasgow to the lovely capital city of Edinburgh, centre since 1947 of the now world-famous International Festival of Music and Drama'. A snatch of *Così Fan Tutte*, then the pipes and drums of the Edinburgh Castle garrison, beating retreat into the night. The voice returns to tell me that 'there isn't time on this trip to visit the romantic highlands and islands of Scotland, so instead let's recall for a moment the voice, which perhaps more than any other, has publicised and indeed immortalised Scotland and the Scottish people in song: the voice of Harry Lauder'. Lauder sings us out with 'I Love a Lassie'.

[I turn the record over.]

To Northern Ireland, the sound of Lambeg drums, talk of linen mills, and a recording of 'Londonderry Air' for string orchestra. Then to Wales, conjured through rugby commentary and choral singing at an Eisteddfod. 'Many of the

singers are engaged in what is perhaps the principal industry of Wales: coal mining. And to them the sound of shot firing at the coalface is a familiar one'. Cue the sound of rock blasting, from which emerges more choral singing, backed by harp and strings.

'Back to England, and to what is undoubtedly the most popular sporting event of the year: the Football Association cup final at Wembley'. I listen to commentary of the 1938 cup final, before my narrator friend enlightens me of other sporting highlights of that year. Test cricket and the Grand National. I'm then informed that 1949 was another good sporting year, and hear snippets of the Derby and the Boat Race. The latter, I'm told, is 'not just an annual sporting event; it's an institution in the heart of London and in the life of the Londoner'.

'Many English customs are of course much older than the boat race, and one of the most famous of these is the Helston Furry Dance. Each year in the second Saturday in May, the people of Helston, in Cornwall, parade and dance through the streets of the town, and indeed through the houses, bringing the luck of summer to the inhabitants'. A brass band plays in the background then comes to the fore as the parade passes. We can't stay long. 'We are nearing the end of our journey through Britain, and back in London, we recall the Promenade concerts—another Great British institution'. I hear the applause and cheering of a Prom audience.

I am told it's time for us to part ways. 'For our last look at London and Britain [the two by now existing in metonymy], let's turn again to pageantry'. The 'Changing of the Guard' at Buckingham Palace, a military band, more shouting. An unruly car horn sounds. 'And as the new guard takes over, the pulse of London and of Britain again beats faster. The symbol of the British way of life is secure. The King's guard is on duty'. My tour ends with a full rendition of 'Land of Hope and Glory' for choir and orchestra. I feel as though maybe I'm supposed to stand up.

This is official culture. Britain is constructed mostly through its monarchy and military, with some sports thrown in as a nod to populism. Military emphasis implies might. The monarchy is the 'symbol of the British way of life'. England dominates, but only southern England; other British nations are acknowledged through caricature and tokenism; empire is silent. Certain aspects of culture

are foregrounded, others excluded. London is the beginning and the end; peripheral 'regions' are heralded mostly for their productive capacities. Onto all is imposed the nation: *A Sound Picture of Great Britain*.

A disparity exists in the way voices are heard. The working classes, seemingly only interested in sport, are heard as a homogenous mass, 'roaring', and inhabiting 'gloomy' and 'noisy' public spaces. In contrast, monarchic and high military voices stand alone in orderly silence, authoritative and commanding. Britain is heard as a firm patriarchy, with exclusive focus on 'work, sporting events, and pageantry'. The only female voice on the whole record is that of a princess. Multiculturalism is nowhere to be found. This *Sound Picture* was an extension of pre-war thinking, utilising BBC recordings from outdoor broadcasting that had sought to produce a national audience. But it also keyed into postwar emplotments of nation that used history, landscape, and tradition to consolidate national identity in the face of much social change.

Remapping Sonic Territory

Beneath the headlines of postwar Britain – of people's peace, rebuilding from rubble, consensus politics, the welfare state, nationalisation of industry, population shake-up, austerity – the decade following the war marked the culmination of what Jed Esty terms Britain's 'anthropological turn'. This section traces the changing conceptualisations of the nation in response to the end of empire, and the forms of knowledge that were then projected onto this reduced nationness. In the face of shifting demographics, phonographic projects like the *Sound Picture of Great Britain* were embroiled in new contestations over territory, and nostalgic claims on national identity.

Following Edward Said's logic of the cultural integrity of empire, through which what happens in the colonies cannot be separated from what happens in the centre, Esty argues that the end of empire was translated into a resurgent concept of national culture.¹ In this he follows Stuart Hall, for whom colonisation was always 'inscribed deeply' within the societies of imperial

¹ Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 2

centres.² Imperial expansion augured a meaning loss as elements of the British economy were relocated overseas, leading to a society that no longer possessed full knowledge of itself.³ With imperial contraction, Esty argues, a form of holistic knowledge that had previously been projected outwards onto the colonies returned to the centre: the nation was remade as a knowable whole.

Put another way, British conceptions of territory were being remapped. 'Britain' came to mean, simply, the British Isles—becoming a site of increased cultural concern as other territories were decolonised. Moreover, aggressive global Britishness was recoded into peaceful humane Englishness.⁴ But for those engaged in projects, mostly emanating from London, presenting Britain as a single, coherent unit, this reduced nationness had then to be stretched back across the British Isles to maintain a discursive unity. The tensions that arose from this series of messy translations were inevitable: Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland were precariously termed 'regions' by a number of British institutions, as their national identities were subordinated to England.⁵

The apogee of postwar nation building, and of the anthropological turn, was the 1951 Festival of Britain. A modern Britain was mapped out from London, employing precise pasts and imagined futures in an effort to provide some relief to a nation still recovering from war. A main Festival site was established at London's South Bank. A Pleasure Garden sat at Battersea as a less demanding counterpart; fun was combined with instruction and improvement. A Land Travelling Exhibition visited urban centres away from the capital, focusing largely on improving everyday life: on home and leisure, on consuming and appreciating well-designed modern products. Tourists were encouraged to visit all corners of the country—a nation on display. The Festival established a tempered or 'soft' modernism as an appropriate style for both Janus-faces of postwar Britain.

² Stuart Hall, 'When was the Post-Colonial?' in *The Post-Colonial Question*, ed. Chambers and Curti (London: Routledge, 1996), 246

³ Esty, *A Shrinking Island*, 6

⁴ Esty, *A Shrinking Island*, 17. Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, Vol. 1 (London: Verso, 1996), 219

⁵ Becky Conekin, *The Autobiography of a Nation: The 1951 Festival of Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 116

Festival historiography focuses almost entirely on its visual style: the temporary architecture of the Skylon and Dome of Discovery; the efficient posters of Abram Games; the clean edification of exhibitions and displays; the scientific patterns of Festival produce. But the Festival had a strong sonic component also; a South Bank exhibition guide remarks that 'the Festival is nationwide. All through the summer, and all through the land, its spirit will be finding expression in a variety of British sights and a great range of British sounds'.⁶

Recorded sound was integral. As noted, HMV released *A Sound Picture of Great Britain* specifically for the event, while a number of Festival songs were commissioned and released in support of official narratives of nation: Cecil Day-Lewis wrote a 'Song for a Festival' at the behest of the Arts Council ('*Dear land, dear land, our roots are deep in you; May your sons, may your sons grow tall and true!*'); another song, 'The Festival of Britain, This Grand Old Land of Mine' was not dissimilar in content.⁷ Sound recordings were also used as part of exhibitions. In Edinburgh, for example, an exhibition of 'Living Traditions' – held at what is now the National Museum of Scotland – focused on Scottish craft skills and vernacular architecture featured a looped recording of Flora MacNeil of Barra piped into the exhibition space.⁸

Recorded sound, then, was part of the Festival's broad project of telling a national story. As Becky Conekin notes, however, empire was excluded from the narrative.⁹ For Conekin, the most obvious levels on which the absence of empire can be explained are twofold: first, that the legacy of colonialism and imperial oppression did not easily correlate with British attempts to paint themselves as freedom bearers in the aftermath of war; second, that due to a simple lack of resources the 'Britain' presented in Festival narratives was limited to the British Isles. Both are sides of the same coin, implicitly telling the

⁶ South Bank Exhibition Guide, 1951, in Harriet Atkinson, *The Festival of Britain: A Land and its People* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 60

⁷ Atkinson, *The Festival of Britain*, 63

⁸ John MacInnes, 'Reminiscences of the School of Scottish Studies of the University of Edinburgh' in '*A Guid Hairst': Collecting and Archiving Scottish Tradition*, ed. Campbell et al (Maastricht: Shaker Publishing, 2013), 236. Alexander Fenton and Margaret A. Mackay, 'A History of Ethnology in Scotland' in *A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology: An Introduction to Scottish Ethnology*, ed. Fenton and Mackay (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2013), 62

⁹ Conekin, *Autobiography of a Nation*, 183-98

story of a nation becoming minor, turning its attention inward. But through further probing of the absence of empire, Conekin offers another reading. This was a defensive move: the British people as depicted by the Festival were 'conceived of as exclusively white and having resided on this island for at least a thousand years'.¹⁰ This was also clearly a political move, but a largely discursive one: both Conekin and Esty make the point that this conception of Britain was already a form of nostalgia by 1951, and that the remaking of Britain as knowable community occurred despite (or because of) the fact that the post-imperial nation would be multicultural.¹¹

Not that cultural diversity was a new development after the war. Its history is older than the nation, albeit one that has been routinely effaced. New arrivals in the aftermath of war – such as the 80,000 plus displaced persons that came to Britain from Central and Eastern Europe after the war, the 120,000 Polish people offered citizenship in recognition of their wartime contribution; the 345,000 recruited from United Nations camps; and, of course, those arriving from Britain's colonies at the end of empire – entered into much longer histories of movement and migration. And much inward migration after World War II was orchestrated by the British Government to assist in rebuilding the country. Officials from the Ministry of Labour were sent to displaced persons camps, recruiting workers to meet the need for labour in industry and farming. A scheme called 'Westward Ho!' was devised to bring people to work in agriculture, forestry, coal mining, and cotton textiles. Other programmes, such as 'Balt Cygnets', were created to bring particular people to Britain, targeting young single women from the Baltic states on the grounds that they would 'make good Britons'.¹² New arrivals from further afield, like those on HMS Windrush in 1948, were also coming to help with postwar reconstruction, having long been told that they were British subjects.

The postwar act of self-anthropologising was part of a twentieth-century history in which reduced nationness incubated a number of projects

¹⁰ Conekin, *Autobiography of a Nation*, 196

¹¹ Conekin, *Autobiography of a Nation*, 198; Esty, *A Shrinking Island*, 165

¹² Siobhan Peeling et al, 'When the War was Over: European Refugees after 1945. Briefing Paper 6: Coming to Britain', University of Nottingham – <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/postwar-refugees/historical-themes/index.aspx>; Robert Winder, *Bloody Foreigners: The Story of Immigration to Britain* (London: Little, Brown, 2004), 245-65

concerned with the internal mechanisms of British society.¹³ Mass-Observation was formed in 1937 to undertake a form of social research, documenting everyday life through volunteers' diary entries and responses to 'directives' (open-ended questionnaires). The Pilgrim Trust launched a 'Recording Britain' project in 1940, employing artists to record changes to British lives and landscapes during wartime, mostly through drawings and watercolours. The Documentary Film Movement originated in the early 1930s within government departments, aiming to present everyday life and leisure through a highly realist aesthetic. And the BBC, particularly the North Region, made use of (relatively) mobile recording equipment and these same aesthetics in its own documentary turn.

In each case, the 'field' was where these internal societal mechanisms were to be found, as technologies and techniques were employed to document life away from the sanitised spaces of sets and studios. The 'field' was where the nation could be located. And at first blush, the field recording moment makes sense within this trajectory. But much of the field recording moment was more closely connected to a different history, one unconcerned with the internal mechanisms of society. (Indeed, documenting change was exactly what the field recording moment was set against. Mass-observation would have complicated the mission of the postwar field recording projects.) Instead, these projects sat within a broader movement concerned with preserving a sense of national identity through safeguarding traditions—held as under threat from various directions: population change, American mass culture, modernity at large.

Territory here becomes conceptually important. Stuart Elden argues for an understanding of territory as a political technology, more to do with relations between power and space, terrain and technique than with notions of land as an inert backdrop for states. Accordingly for Elden, territory is never static, but is 'a process, made and remade, shaped and reshaped, active and reactive'.¹⁴ Moreover, projects of nation building can, and frequently do, take place within

¹³ Esty, *A Shrinking Island*, 193

¹⁴ Stuart Elden, *The Birth of Territory* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 17

well-established territorial borders.¹⁵ Elden's conception of territory as a political technology is predicated upon Heidegger's argument that the essence of technology is not necessarily technological, but is rather a way of grasping the world.¹⁶ So a fuller understanding of territory is built from the techniques used by governments and institutions to measure and manage terrain and population.¹⁷

It is no coincidence that many of the field recording projects of postwar Britain were framed as surveys, as objective accounts of existing traditions within British borders. Of course they were more complicated, more political, than that. Acts of phonography like *A Sound Picture of Great Britain*, and of the field recording projects that unfolded alongside it, were rather part of a territorial campaign over sonic space. For those at the helm of the various field recording projects, sonic pressures were being placed on their understandings of 'nation' and 'tradition'. The field recording moment was the outgrowth of a sonic territoriality in which 'Britain' had to be defended. Sound was one of many contested sites of postwar culture.

A Sound Picture of Great Britain tells us two things that may not seem apparent on first listen, but that place it firmly within this cultural history. First, it is pitched at its outset to 'the visitor returning home ... to the exile who perhaps hasn't seen Britain for many years'. It is easy to read this returning visitor as a colonial official; or perhaps as someone returning from war, and mentally returning to the 1930s; or, on a more abstract level, it could be the kind of knowledge that renders the nation a knowable unit of social and cultural relations, in line with the anthropological turn. A primitivising impulse is turned inwards. Second, the *Sound Picture* concludes with the satisfied assertion of a 'British way of life' being secure. But the question that hangs in the air as the record stops is: secure in the face of what?

John Picker illustrates how efforts were made to purge foreign musicians from city streets in England in the mid-nineteenth century, whereby a controversy over offensive sounds was transformed into one over invaded

¹⁵ Elden, *The Birth of Territory*, 323

¹⁶ Elden, *The Birth of Territory*, 16

¹⁷ Elden, *The Birth of Territory*, 17

spaces.¹⁸ And George Revill tells us how sound can inform 'moral geographies of landscape, nation, and citizen', but that these geographies are contingent upon sonic performances of inclusion and exclusion.¹⁹ When placed into the broader Festival of Britain, and bearing in mind the sounds it offers to its listeners, the *Sound Picture* becomes a piece of territorial phonography: a bulwark against postwar reverse colonisation, a sounding of national purity, an act of audio decontamination.

Back to the Land

One of the main thrusts of the Festival of Britain was to produce national narratives that reached back to the beginning of 'British time' – the Festival was termed 'the autobiography of a nation' – chiefly by re-forging a love for the land to provide a national sense of place.²⁰ Philip Bohlman writes that 'the nation that national music evokes may be most evident in nature or the natural landscape, in a national or proto-national language, or in a national people'.²¹ This section and the next one will trace some of the cultural shifts at play in the years following World War II that emphasised the connection between nature and the nation. These shifts created a favourable environment for certain ideas of national musical tradition, but also created problems for the self-appointed custodians of such tradition in England: the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS). EFDSS continued in this period to stick with earlier orthodoxies of regarding an illiterate peasant class as the bearers of musical tradition, in line with the position of the International Folk Music Council, despite this being an untenable position after (and arguably long before) the war.²² In particular, the absence of existing sound recordings – a historical lack

¹⁸ John M. Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 49

¹⁹ George Revill, 'Music and the Politics of Sound: Nationalism, Citizenship, and Auditory Space', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 18 (2000), 597-98

²⁰ Atkinson, *The Festival of Britain*, 2

²¹ Philip Bohlman, *Music, Nationalism, and the Making of the New Europe* (London: Routledge, 2011) 60

²² The idea that folk music could only be rural music was by no means exclusive to Britain at this time; international scholarship across the world, in folklore and ethnomusicology, was working with the same assumption. With few exceptions – for instance, fieldwork conducted as part of the New Deal in 1930s America, the work of Arthur Alberts in West Africa, Hugh Tracey in South Africa and elsewhere on the continent, Tony Schwartz in New York – field recordists focused their attentions on

caused by earlier EFDSS policy – created a demand for the (re-)construction of collective sonic memory, to which the institution struggled to respond.

Festival organisers considered a passion for the countryside as the very essence of Britishness.²³ This act of situating the nation in spaces of rurality was reflected in a broader postwar turn to the village, which itself was the outgrowth of earlier twentieth-century developments. Detailing artistic activities south of the border, Alexandra Harris recounts the ‘imaginative claiming of England’ that developed in the interwar period and gathered momentum as war threatened again. Through a series of relocations and a figurative ‘turn towards home’, a number of artists were part of a movement to stall urbanisation and reinvigorate rural life, with the perhaps unlikely outcome that villages became avant-garde centres in the 1930s.²⁴ As wartime ended, an increasing number of cultural and political positions clustered around the same idea: Festival chief organiser, Gerald Barry, posited the village as ‘the guardian still of the deepest truths of the British way of life’; while even modern aspects of postwar optimism were at once harkening back, with Nye Bevan likening new housing estates to ‘modern villages’ where all classes could live in harmony.²⁵

Rural life was championed for its restorative qualities to an exhausted nation. And this postwar fixation on the rural accords with Raymond Williams’s argument that, despite urban population having exceeded rural population in England by the mid-nineteenth century, the rural continued to punch above its cultural weight:

So much of the past of the country, its feelings and its literature, was involved with rural experience, and so many of its ideas of how to live

rural areas. This was largely still the case well into the 1970s, when ethnomusicologists began to listen to towns and cities. See, for example, David Rycroft, ‘Evidence of Stylistic Continuity in Zulu “Town” Music’ in *Essays for a Humanist: An Offering to Klaus Wachsmann*, ed. Mantle Hood (New York: The Town House Press, 1977), 216–60. I can’t fit all these stories in this thesis, however, so I focus on those international connections that fed most directly into recording and archiving practices in postwar Britain

²³ Atkinson, *The Festival of Britain*, 19

²⁴ Alexandra Harris, *Romantic Moderns: English Writers, Artists and the Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010), 10, 169

²⁵ Atkinson, *The Festival of Britain*, 180

well, from the style of the country-house to the simplicity of the cottage, persisted and even were strengthened, that there is almost an inverse proportion, in the 20th century, between the relative importance of the working rural economy and the cultural importance of rural ideas.²⁶

Extending out of this ruralism was the notion that tradition was central to the kinds of cultural wholeness being projected onto the nation as the anthropological turn concluded. Ideas linking tradition to cultural integrity came from cultural theorists of various political stripes, notably F.R Leavis and his conservative scrutiny, and Richard Hoggart and his nascent cultural studies.

Tradition, cultural integrity, and rurality were used as shorthand for national culture, and became caught up in defensive strategies against the influx of other, particularly American, cultures. Anti-American sentiment had permeated cultural conversations in Britain since at least the 1920s, and was baked into conceptualisations of nation in the aftermath of war. This discourse, for Conekin, haunted Festival of Britain officials in the years of its planning.²⁷ Even Keynes was at it, trumpeting in his role as chair of the newly formed Arts Council:

How satisfactory it would be if different parts of the country would again walk their several ways as they once did and learn to develop something different from their neighbours and characteristic of themselves. Nothing can be more damaging than the excessive prestige of metropolitan standards and fashions. Let every part of Merry England be merry in its own way. Death to Hollywood!²⁸

²⁶ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 2011[1973]), 248.

²⁷ Conekin, *'The Autobiography of a Nation'*, 156

²⁸ In Conekin, *'The Autobiography of a Nation'*, 157. Conekin draws on Geoff Eley to rightly point out the disingenuous manner of this statement from Keynes, an embodiment of metropolitanism. And it is interesting to consider Keynes's anti-Americanism as an attempt to place Britain in Europe rather than in the Atlantic. This period also saw Britain become part of European high culture in new ways, thanks particularly to the Edinburgh International Festival, founded in 1947. This kind of

In his attempt to find a usable core of national culture, Keynes here neatly folds anti-Americanism, anti-metropolitanism, and perhaps even anti-urbanity together. What emerges is a localism rooted in a reversion to some form of pastness. But it would be inaccurate to claim that the turns to the local, the rural, and the village mapped so far in this section were predicated on uses of *the past*. Rather, they worked by exaggerating – even imagining – *some pasts*, while systematically excluding others that did not fit.

In other words, the nation being produced by politicians, artists, theorists, and administrators was one built upon perceived golden ages. Out went the Victorian age with its capitalism, imperialism and class conflict; in came Georgian aesthetics, a new picturesque, and essentialised and supposedly 'timeless traditions'.²⁹ At the heart of this nation building was a desire to recover local cultures that had been damaged – so it was argued – not just by globalisation but also by the Industrial Revolution. The love of the land being incubated by Festival of Britain organisers was about repairing links between people and place supposedly severed by industrialisation as much as by war. The eighteenth century was eulogised as the time before 'factoriculture'; a belief prevailed that the Industrial Revolution had devalued and undermined the structure of village life;³⁰ efforts were made to recover fragments of culture from a pre-industrial past.

All of the above seemingly worked in the favour of those attempting to reinsert traditional musics into postwar sound culture. Yet there was an absence of sonic memory and history of place, thanks largely to the attitudes toward recording technology of earlier generations of folklorists and revivalists in Britain. Such a dearth of recordings can be traced back to an exchange of views on collecting methodology early in the twentieth century. Australian composer Percy Grainger made phonograph recordings in 1906 and 1908, formerly in Lincolnshire and latterly in London and Gloucestershire. He then

cultural endeavour could no longer be centred in Berlin or Vienna, so Britain, almost by default, became a centre of European modernism

²⁹ Harris, *Romantic Moderns*, 59-85. Atkinson, *The Festival of Britain*, 64. Conekin, 'The Autobiography of a Nation', 80

³⁰ Atkinson, *The Festival of Britain*, 6, 66, 180

published an article in the pages of the Folk Song Society (now EFDSS) journal, offering detailed transcriptions of recordings and a series of thoughts on using this method to represent music in as 'merely scientific' means as possible.³¹ The response printed in the *Journal* was partly some acceptance of Grainger's ideas, but mostly the strong reservation of the editors, on the grounds that the transcriptions were too scientific and that sound recording amounted to a lost innocence of the ear.

Moreover, Grainger had sought the opinion of Cecil Sharp, who was in the process of establishing his theories as paradigmatic to the folksong movement in England at that time. Sharp had a number of objections: that the phonograph was off-putting to singers; that many singers were too frail of voice to perform at an adequate volume for the machine; that machines lacked portability and were thus a hindrance to fieldwork; that playback of recordings were untrustworthy with regards to hearing words correctly.³² Sharp's main objection, though, concerned transcription. He wrote to Grainger: 'in transcribing a song, our aim should be to record its artistic effect, not necessarily the exact means by which that effect was produced ... it is not an exact, scientifically accurate memorandum that is wanted, so much as a faithful artistic record of what is actually heard by the ordinary auditor'.³³ While Sharp makes some valid points on the agency of the phonograph in the fieldwork encounter, and the limitations of the technology, his rejection of sound recording hinges on the argument that the competent collector has a better idea of what a singer intends to sing than the singer herself. And as with many of his opinions, Sharp's aversion to sound recording became orthodoxy.

By the time World War II drew to a close, then, the most significant recordings of folk musics in England had been made by outsiders: most notably Grainger, already mentioned, and James Madison Carpenter, a Harvard scholar visiting in the late 1920s and early 1930s.³⁴ Brits had been

³¹ Percy Grainger, 'Collecting with the Phonograph', *Journal of the Folk Song Society*, 12 (1908), 147-69

³² Michael Yates, 'Percy Grainger and the Impact of the Phonograph', *Folk Music Journal*, 4: 3 (1982), 265-75

³³ In Yates, 'Percy Grainger', 269

³⁴ There were some exceptions: Sharp tried using a phonograph in 1907; Ralph Vaughan Williams followed suit in 1909. C.J Bearman details a fuller history of early uses of the phonograph in the folk song movement in England. Bearman, 'Percy

recording abroad, however, focusing an ethnographic ear on the colonies. Alfred Cort Haddon led a team from Cambridge University, including W.H.R. Rivers and Charles Myers, on an 'Anthropological Expedition' to the Torres Strait in 1898, which included making sound recordings of musics. This colonial recording work maps onto the anthropological turn, whereby ethnographic uses of the phonograph were largely turned outwards, only for such approaches then to be repatriated with the waning of empire.³⁵ (It also gives British ethnomusicology a dual history that is yet to be fully synthesised.³⁶)

The lack of field recording activity in Britain in the first half of the twentieth century connected with a larger apathy toward recorded sound among national institutions. The British Museum began taking deposits of recording masters from the Gramophone Company in 1906, building up a collection over the following decades. Recordings were mostly of royalty and politicians, clerics and military men, as well as a host of operatic singers: Caruso, Patti, Melba. Percy Grainger's aforementioned recordings of Lincolnshire singer Joseph Taylor went in, as did the voices of Tolstoy and Ernest Shackleton. Space limitations meant most recordings were rejected. And focus was placed on the sounds of people's voices, with the outcome that further recordings of a voice already housed in the collection were denied entry. So, as Timothy Day highlights, the Museum's attitude toward sound archiving was hardly enthusiastic: by 1925 some 100,000 records had been released globally; the British Museum had a few dozen of them.³⁷

The BBC formally established a sound archive in 1941, after archivist Marie Slocombe (who features prominently in Chapters Four and Five) decided against throwing out broadcast discs of playwrights and politicians in 1936. It

Grainger, the Phonograph, and the Folk Song Society', *Music & Letters*, 84: 3 (2003), 434-55

³⁵ Esty, *A Shrinking Island*, 10

³⁶ Helen Myers, 'Great Britain', in Myers (ed.) *Ethnomusicology: Historical and Regional Studies* (London: Macmillan, 1993), 129-48. Bennett Zon, 'The Music of Non-Western Nations and the Evolution of British Ethnomusicology' in *The Cambridge History of World Music*, ed. Philip Bohlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 298-318

³⁷ Timothy Day, 'The National Sound Archive: The First Fifty Years' in *Aural History: Essays on Recorded Sound*, ed. Andy Linehan (London: The British Library, 2001), 41-2

wasn't until 1955 that Patrick Saul founded the British Institute of Recorded Sound in London, building a collection on public donations of discs. The Institute's acquisitions policy was deliberately inclusive and far-reaching, rejecting nothing on aesthetic grounds on the basis that future interests could not be second-guessed.³⁸ Recordings of various sounds came to the Institute: jazz and folk musics from around the world, art musics from China and India, dialects and accents and the sounds of the natural world. But this didn't solve the problem of the absence of historical recordings of traditional musics in Britain.

In other words, the earlier dismissal of phonography as collecting method meant there were few sonic materials to feed the postwar appetite for the situating of the nation in rural spaces and pre-industrial pasts. There was an absence of collective memory in sonic form, an absence of sounding history. And there was a perceived need to then (re-)construct this memory and aural history through new recordings of old musics. This catalysed the field recording moment, and it even informed the postwar policy of the EFDSS.

The Uses of Illiteracy

The English Folk Dance and Song Society was a 1932 merger of the Folk Song Society (founded in 1898) and the English Folk Dance Society (founded in 1911). The early work of the Folk Song Society had been focused on the collection, in the form of written notation, of what was considered English folk song. It drew together the work of individuals such as Cecil Sharp, Lucy Broadwood, Kate Lee, Sabine Baring-Gould, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Anne Gilchrist, Frank Kidson and George Butterworth, amongst others. By 1930, the Society had a headquarters—Cecil Sharp House in north London. The work of collecting the nation's folk music was deemed to be complete, and focus had shifted to establishing folk song and dance in education curricula. Despite his death in 1924, the Society continued to use Cecil Sharp's conception of an ideal folk society – highly stable, conservative, and rural; unaffected by

³⁸ Day, 'The National Sound Archive', 44-5

industrialisation, literacy or urban tastes – as its model, having attained dominance over competing versions of folk music and its application.³⁹

EFDSS policy in the immediate postwar period was marked by a conscious effort to enter the cultural mainstream. Its Director, Douglas Kennedy, declared at the 1945 Annual General Meeting that he was ‘hoping to make a fresh start with a new policy and different methods of presentation of our dances and songs’.⁴⁰ This fresh start was devised in response to the feeling that ‘masses of the people still remain untouched’ by the Society’s work.⁴¹ In this regard Kennedy echoed an earlier letter, sent in May 1945, from EFDSS to the Ministry of Education and the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA, shortly to become the Arts Council), which expressed the Society’s desire to ‘fit into the work of other kindred bodies and with the general educational and cultural policy of the country’.⁴² Yet by 1954, the EFDSS Executive Committee were talking of being in a state of financial crisis, and by 1955 were despairing that they were ‘not really touching the folk singers of England’, let alone the public at large.⁴³

As early as 1947 EFDSS had been turned down for funding from (then newly-formed) UNESCO, on the grounds that the Society ‘did not represent a part of English culture’.⁴⁴ Part of the Society’s problem was an unwavering sense of institutional hegemony, irrespective of what was going on around it. As self-appointed custodians of tradition, EFDSS leaders believed any activity involving folk music or dance should and would pass through Cecil Sharp House. The Society saw itself as providing a public service, and enjoyed financial support from the state. The Ministry of Education supplied an annual grant of between £6000 and £7500; Local Education Authorities provided £1450 in 1947; and the Arts Council and the Carnegie UK Trust offered

³⁹ James Porter, ‘Europe’ in *Ethnomusicology: Historical and Regional Studies*, ed. Helen Myers (London: Macmillan, 1993), 217

⁴⁰ EFDSS Annual Report, 1945–1946, VWML

⁴¹ EFDSS Annual Report, 1945–1946, VWML

⁴² Letter from Finance Committee, 3 May 1945, EFDSS Minutes, Vol. 19, VWML

⁴³ Executive Committee meeting minutes, 21 July 1954, EFDSS Minutes, Vol. 22, VWML; Sales and Publications Sub-Committee meeting minutes, 6 October 1955, EFDSS Minutes, Vol. 22, VWML

⁴⁴ Director’s Report, 6 February 1947, EFDSS Minutes, Vol. 19, VWML

occasional donations and grants.⁴⁵ But policy consisted not of listening to the public, but of making the public listen. Focus remained firmly fixed on training musicians and dancers how to perform correctly, and work was undertaken to 'make the public conscious of the Society's existence and grant us its active good will'.⁴⁶

The nation's musical traditions were heard as unchanging: a set of texts collected in the 1900s that required no updating. Detecting a growing public interest in collecting vernacular musics, two of the Society's senior figures – its President, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and Cecil Sharp's long-time collaborator, Maud Karpeles – led a move to discourage such activities. They deemed 'inexpert observing and collecting' as dangerous, and the EFDSS Executive Committee agreed that 'amateur observers should not be encouraged to interfere with traditional customs'.⁴⁷ Reactionary attitudes towards tradition and participation notwithstanding, such a stance betrays an unwillingness to question what national music was or could be, or how it related to society in general, at a time of great social and cultural change.

As noted, population shifts in Britain have a lengthy history, and urbanisation had been underway for centuries. Rural life in England had also undergone significant transformation in recent decades, with improved public transport between villages and towns, electric lighting and central heating, weekenders arriving, commuters leaving.⁴⁸ In 1949, book publisher Noel Carrington wrote of a 'silent revolution' that had taken place in English villages. Singling out the bus as the great catalyst, Carrington's portrayal of villages was one of shaking off the 'coma of stagnation' and a feeling of inferiority among rural dwellers.⁴⁹ Living conditions were improving: 'there will not be the same touching of caps, but there will not be so much boredom, nor so much

⁴⁵ EFDSS Annual Reports 1946–1947, 1952–1953; EFDSS Minutes 29 April 1947, 29 June 1953, VWML

⁴⁶ EFDSS Secretary letter to Area Officials and Executive Committee, April 1947, EFDSS Minutes, Vol. 19, VWML

⁴⁷ Joint Sub-Committee on Matters of Cultural Interest meeting minutes, 10 October 1947; Executive Committee meeting minutes, 23 October 1947, EFDSS Minutes, Vol. 19, VWML

⁴⁸ Harris, *Romantic Moderns*, 169

⁴⁹ Noel Carrington, *Life in an English Village* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1949), 19

rheumatism from damp floors'.⁵⁰ Carrington posits constant change as natural in villages, but is also aware of a certain narrative of loss that accompanies change, particularly in regard to cultural activities. Farmhands could now spend the afternoon at the cinema; concerts and theatre groups came to the village. Carrington acknowledged that some would not welcome these activities.⁵¹

The EFDSS could easily be counted in this latter camp, insisting that people maintain – and don't interfere with – narrowly defined traditional practices. Raymond Williams, however, challenged the narrative of loss, arguing that the old days were the bad days, that villages were now less oppressive and deprived, and that people who had moved from the country to the city had a much better idea of what they had lost, and gained, in making these moves than those shouting 'culture crisis' from institutional rooftops.⁵² From another footing, Bruno Nettl writes of the political dimension to cultural conservatism: 'We should ask ourselves whether we should continue encouraging people to keep up their old practices, asking them to do what they perhaps would not wish to do, just for the sake of the rest of the world'.⁵³ This line of thinking was not on the EFDSS radar, which continued to search only for an idealised and nostalgic rurality.

As a result, the majority of the population was written off as being either incapable of sustaining traditional practices, or having any culture at all. At the same time, though, others were locating practices of popular culture that contained qualities championed by EFDSS, but in sites long-since denigrated as culturally corrupt by the Society: cities and industrial areas. In *The Uses of Literacy*, a part auto-ethnographic, part cultural sociological study of mid-century working-class culture in Leeds (and bits of Manchester, Sheffield and Hull), Richard Hoggart details an oral/aural tradition found in clubs and pubs in the north of England. Hoggart depicts the communal pub pianist as the inheritor of folk tradition, and describes how, rather than uncritically accepting

⁵⁰ Carrington, *Life in an English Village*, 30

⁵¹ Carrington, *Life in an English Village*, 22

⁵² Williams, *The Country and the City*, 257, 271

⁵³ Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-One Issues and Concepts* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 170. Nettl's questioning pertains to the politics of ethnomusicological interventions across continents, but the issue is equally relevant within national borders.

mass music from Tin Pan Alley, local communities subject songs to their own requirements, choosing and adapting those that fit.⁵⁴ To put it another way, urban pub music cultures mapped neatly onto the central tenets of Cecil Sharp's theory of folk process—community selection, creative variation, and continuity linking past and present. The EFDSS continued to work with Sharp's principles in the postwar period, but the thought of going to city and mill-town pubs didn't occur.

Hoggart's findings, then, corroborate more recent ideas that culture and technologies are made meaningful locally, that globalisation is a localising force.⁵⁵ Yet Hoggart, too, seemed to believe in golden ages, positing turn-of-the-century music hall as the finest period in English urban popular song.⁵⁶ And he had his own uneasy portents of passivity and cultural degeneration, including the 'spiritual dry rot' of the jukebox, and its listeners: 'the directionless and tamed helots of a machine-minding class'.⁵⁷ So the actors in this section can all be said to be on what Raymond Williams describes as the moving escalator of history: the tendency of writers in Britain to paint an earlier time – often the time of their own childhood – as an idealised society, with the intervening decades marked by the destruction of an organic community.⁵⁸ Williams traces these declamations back through the sixteenth century and beyond. So on the one hand, as Williams points out, the past has long been used as a stick to beat the present; and on the other hand, history is always being claimed for the nation, as a place in which a purer form of nationness could be found. The same applies for national music.

Vaughan Williams, in his role as EFDSS President, had plenty to say about national music. He maintained that the Society should be arbiters of which songs and dances were to be preserved, as they were the 'foundations of all the cultural structure in England'.⁵⁹ He warned of the 'inherent dangers' of

⁵⁴ Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life* (London: Penguin, 2009[1957]), 129-44

⁵⁵ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 1996)

⁵⁶ Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, 135

⁵⁷ Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, 221-2

⁵⁸ Williams, *The Country and the City*, 9-12

⁵⁹ President's Speech, EFDSS Annual Report, 1951-1952, VWML

popularisation, and railed against 'vulgar' and 'debased' American dancing.⁶⁰ And he repeatedly blamed the Education Act of 1870 for damaging oral tradition. For Vaughan Williams, after 1870 'people learned to read and write', and began to buy 'cheap and nasty music instead of making good music for themselves'.⁶¹ Mass illiteracy was seemingly a worthwhile trade-off for a healthy oral tradition, and formed part of Vaughan Williams's quest to preserve what he heard as the soul of the nation, as expressed two decades earlier in a book on *National Music*.⁶² Music was this soul's highest expression, and could preserve the identity of both the individual and the nation.⁶³

His problem with literacy was that the folk singer's memory had been 'atrophied by reading', which in turn was linked to his belief that folk song contained 'the spirit of nationality', and that 'the humblest singer in a remote village' and the 'great artist' both belonged inevitably to their country.⁶⁴ National culture and identity were at stake, and the EFDSS under Vaughan Williams's presidency remained fixated on supposedly unlearned expressions of national spirit. (He had earlier advocated a five-year musical isolation plan, during which time only indigenous music would be allowed.⁶⁵) Moral geographies of landscape, nation, and citizen were at the heart of Vaughan Williams's soul-searching.

His concerns over literacy also found voice in an ambivalence toward sound recordings. While he credited the gramophone and radio for bringing 'the world's riches to the doors of the humblest', he also worried that 'if we all become listeners there will soon be no one left to listen to'.⁶⁶ In regard to oral tradition, he lumped listening to recordings in with reading and writing, chastising young people for imperilling folk music: 'Only the old people knew them [traditional songs]. The younger men and women, nurtured on that

⁶⁰ President's Speech, EFDSS Annual Reports, 1948–1949; Executive Committee meeting minutes, 5 December 1951, EFDSS Minutes, Vol. 21, VWML

⁶¹ Vaughan Williams letter to P.B. Fox, 17 January 1952, EFDSS Minutes, Vol. 21; President's Speech, EFDSS Annual Reports, 1953–1954, VWML

⁶² Ralph Vaughan Williams, *National Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934)

⁶³ Vaughan Williams, *National Music*, 123–5

⁶⁴ Vaughan Williams, *National Music*, 42, 114, 12–13. Vaughan Williams's anxieties about literacy were hardly new; Socrates also laments the erosion of memory through reading in the *Phaedrus*

⁶⁵ Vaughan Williams, *National Music*, 128–9

⁶⁶ Vaughan Williams, *National Music*, 122

insidious form of snobbery called "popular education" affected to despise the art which their forefathers had loved, and preferred the machine-made shoddy from the local music shop'.⁶⁷

In addition to his role as EFDSS President, Vaughan Williams was also President of the International Folk Music Council (IFMC), and was thus one of many points of connection between the two organisations. The IFMC had been founded in 1947 with affiliations to UNESCO, on the back of a donation of £100 from EFDSS and a donation of the same amount received anonymously. Maud Karpeles was central to IFMC activities in her position as Honorary Secretary, and the organisation as a whole had a distinct European bias: just three of the seventeen members of its Executive Board represented non-European nations (one of those three being Klaus Wachsmann, a German-British ethnomusicologist representing Uganda).

The IFMC heard its activities as contributing to peace, including in its constitution the objective 'to promote understanding and friendship between nations through the common interest of folk music', and investing folk music with the potential to 'play its part in the reconstruction of a world tormented by wars and universal catastrophes, divided by irreconcilable (or so seeming) ideologies, and weakened by a collective anguish and an arid materialism'.⁶⁸ It placed priority on the exchange of recordings between nations as an act of cultural diplomacy, publishing an *International Catalogue of Folk Music Records* through Oxford University Press, and lobbying UNESCO to seek customs exemptions for exchanges of recorded folk musics. Recordings had exchange value, even when not for sale.

Yet the Council's institutional legitimacy was contingent upon establishing an essential divide between folk and popular musics. Vaughan Williams led the charge, asserting a 'distinct cleavage between the true folk song composed *by* the people and the popular song composed *for* the people'.⁶⁹ And Karpeles worked hard to secure Cecil Sharp's theories at the heart of global postwar

⁶⁷ Vaughan Williams, 'This Week's Good Cause', *English Dance and Song*, XV: 3 (Nov 1950), 72

⁶⁸ IFMC, 'The International Folk Music Council: Its Formation and Progress', *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, 1 (1949), 4; International Folk Music Council, 'General Report', *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, 5 (1953), 22

⁶⁹ Vaughan Williams, 'Opening Session Address', *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, 5 (1953), 7. Original emphasis

conceptualisations of folk music, giving multiple papers on defining the term at IFMC conferences, and succeeding, after some resistance, in writing Sharp's ideas of continuity, variation and selection into the official IFMC definition of folk music in 1954.⁷⁰ A boundary was drawn between folk and other musics; the former term was to be applied only to those musics that had 'been evolved from rudimentary beginnings by a community uninfluenced by popular and art music'.⁷¹

The Council's position was an ideological admixture, consisting of several equal parts: a continuation of the long-held Herderian belief that folk music was the preserve of a rural peasantry, and had to be collected from them; a stand against mass culture, advocating 'traditional ways of recreation' as 'an antidote to empty and passive forms of amusement';⁷² an anti-urbanity to counter processes that place people 'in a desperate condition of loneliness' amongst 'the masses of great cities';⁷³ an effort to curb the movement of peoples – from country to city and from nation to nation – and the ensuing musical cosmopolitanisms;⁷⁴ and a rally against universal education.⁷⁵ By 1955, the outlook for folk music – as defined by the IFMC – was so bleak that a 'Resolution Concerning the Preservation of Folk Music' was drawn up, and sent to UNESCO and 'all the governments of the world' (Figure 2.1).⁷⁶

⁷⁰ IFMC, 'Resolutions: Definition of Folk Music', *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, 7 (1955), 23. This struggle is detailed in Chapter Four

⁷¹ IFMC, 'Definition of Folk Music', 23

⁷² IFMC, 'General Report', *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, 5 (1953), 15

⁷³ IFMC, 'General Report', 15

⁷⁴ IFMC, 'General Report', 12

⁷⁵ IFMC, 'General Report', 12

⁷⁶ IFMC, 'Editorial', *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, 8 (1956), 1-2

The Members of the International Folk Music Council, assembled at Oslo
on the 30th day of June, 1955:

Being gravely concerned at the rapid disappearance of traditional songs, dances and instrumental music which is taking place in most countries of the world as a consequence of the sudden break in the continuity of the lives of those who have hitherto been the bearers of the tradition:

Considering that the rapid extension of education, the incursions of industrialism, and, above all, the spread of commercialised mechanical music are superimposing an alien culture on traditional modes of artistic expression; and that the present decline in the traditional practice of folk music arises not from unprejudiced choice but from the loss of confidence engendered by the unaccustomed ways of modern life:

Being convinced that folk music has a unique value in the life of today as (a) being in itself a complete and satisfying form of artistic expression as well as a basis for further musical development, (b) playing an important part in the scientific and historical study in the art of music and in the sociological study of mankind, and (c) forming a bond of union between the peoples of all countries at all levels of culture:

Believing that, while our modern civilisation is destroying folk music, it also has the power to revitalise it and to save for posterity by means of mechanical recording and filming, providing that the work be done forthwith in the spirit of the injunction, '*Colligite quae superaverunt, ne pereant*':

Have resolved to bring to the notice of governments, UNESCO and other authoritative bodies the urgency and importance of preserving the folk music of their own countries: to suggest (1) that they should take immediate steps to ensure the recording and filming, under expert guidance, of all extant authentic folk music, and (2) that they should treat the preservation and encouragement of folk culture as an indispensable adjunct to any campaign that may be undertaken against illiteracy.

Figure 2.1: IFMC Resolution Concerning the Preservation of Folk Music, 1955

Such a resolution reflected, and contributed to, normative models of mid-century European musical folklore and anthropology. 1955 was also the year Claude Lévi-Strauss, for instance, published *Tristes Tropiques* (translated into English as *A World on the Wane*), painting a sad picture of disintegrating difference in the face of commodity-driven monoculture. Yet more recent positions have critiqued this stance. James Clifford posits Lévi-Strauss's narrative as 'too neat': assuming a 'questionable Eurocentric position at the "end" of a unified human history, gathering up, memorialising the world's local historicities'.⁷⁷ This kind of memorialising, for Clifford, assumes a process of ruin and cultural decay, and fails to account for the agency of individuals and groups to improvise local performances 'from (re) collected pasts, drawing on foreign media, symbols, and languages'.⁷⁸

The IFMC's position contains a similar set of nested assumptions, prejudices and contradictions. Firstly, its anti-literacy tack surely runs counter to the aims of UNESCO (the 'E' of its acronym standing for 'Educational'). Secondly, it too fails to account for individual agency, hearing tradition and modernity as a zero-sum game rather than a dynamic interrelation in which people make music in societies for a multitude of reasons. Thirdly, it views cultural change from the top-down and is thus quite undemocratic, insisting on particular performance styles and repertoires without concern for the wishes of the musicians in question. Fourthly, it posits technology as a positive and negative force, claiming it can only be used for good purposes with sufficient expertise and authority, which are accordingly granted to the Council. And fifthly, it implicitly encourages cultural nationalism as the basis for international cooperation, urging governments to salvage the folk music 'of their own countries', thereby maintaining an indexical link between folk and nation, and denying representational space to the enormous numbers of people displaced as a consequence of global conflict and colonialism.

Despite typical mid-century claims to science, preservation is imbued with all kinds of politics. The IFMC model of preservation also amounted to a form of purification. Traditions considered 'alien' were purged from conceptions of

⁷⁷ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 14-15

⁷⁸ Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 14

national music, and types of music were artificially demarcated from one another—both of these ideas were already shaping the contours of the field recording moment in Britain. Performances of musics from Eastern Europe at the 1951 IFMC conference in Yugoslavia were highly praised by Marie Slocombe, who was an IFMC member and EFDSS committee member in addition to her job as BBC sound archivist. But no effort was made to listen to, or record, the music of the 80,000 guestworkers from Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia who were recruited for work in Britain after the war.⁷⁹

There was a seeming reluctance to engage with displacement and migration, as they complicated the implicit onus on the national in IFMC activism. This was despite the fact that much fuss had previously been made of the 'survival' of British folk culture in the Appalachian mountains of America. Cecil Sharp joyfully described the people encountered on his Appalachian fieldwork of 1916 – for which he was accompanied by Karpeles – as 'just exactly what the English peasant was one hundred years ago'.⁸⁰ This amounted to an imbalance in the enthusiasm for 'British' musics overseas and 'overseas' musics in Britain. And well-intentioned talk of peace and mutualism was coupled with an impulse to isolate those cultures deemed traditional. Record exchanges were for elite ears only, not for those whose voices were being exchanged.

The international conversations taking place within the IFMC in the first years of its existence informed EFDSS practices on a national level, not least because of the involvement of many individuals in both organisations, and the centrality of English perspectives to IFMC operations. There were national and international incentives to making recordings—the two contexts blurred and overlapping. Both fed into a realisation within EFDSS that the organisation should establish a sound archive. It was acknowledged that the Society, and the country, had very few folk records of value to offer, and was far behind other countries in archiving practices.⁸¹ The few existing records made earlier

⁷⁹ Winder, *Bloody Foreigners*, 254

⁸⁰ Sharp in Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 25

⁸¹ Library Sub-Committee report, 10 July 1947, EFDSS Minutes, Vol. 19, VWML

by Society members on wax cylinders were now deemed 'practically useless', and the cost of reproducing early disc records was 'so high as to be at present prohibitive'.⁸² These findings accord with Jonathan Sterne's argument that the idea of preservation, of setting sounds safely beyond time, prevalent in discourses around early sound recording was a fantasy.⁸³ Preservation was, and is, something that had to be learned and constantly performed.

They also highlight the effects of new recording formats on old ones. Magnetic tape was becoming widely available as a recording medium from 1947, having been patented in 1898, developed in Nazi Germany, then appropriated (through confiscation of equipment and free licensing of Axis-owned patents) by Allied forces as the war ended.⁸⁴ The improved sound quality of tape recordings – their signal to noise ratio, ability to accommodate two or more channels, longer recording length, and relative ease of editing – rendered earlier technologies deficient. (This despite the fact that, as Travis Jackson points out, early twentieth-century comparative musicologists like Otto Abraham and Erich von Hornbostel thought the recording equipment of their time was sufficiently well developed that 'nothing else is wanting for the establishment of an archive of lasting musical documents of exotic music and for the nurturing of this branch of ethnology'.⁸⁵)

In any case, EFDSS were aware that they needed to make recordings, and set about devising a recording policy. The idea of fieldwork, however, didn't register. A policy meeting of November 1946 had yielded the following strategy:

Records of folk song: Members provided lists of songs which they desired to see recorded, to propose to the Gramophone Company at a discussion about to take place: and agreed that the recording of a

⁸² Librarian's Report, 10 July 1947, EFDSS Minutes, Vol. 19, VWML

⁸³ Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 287-333

⁸⁴ Gordon Mumma et al, 'Recording', *Oxford Music Online*; George Brock-Nannestad, 'The Development of Recording Technologies' in *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook et al (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 163-5

⁸⁵ Abraham and von Hornbostel in Travis Jackson, 'Disseminating World Music' in *The Cambridge History of World Music*, ed. Philip Bohlman, 708

selection of song-tunes only, played on a solo instrument, preferably wind, for purposes of exhibiting English folk music abroad, and for musical study, should also be proposed.⁸⁶

These song lists were collated, divided up into two categories: Category A for 'ready sale'; Category B for 'study records and those for the informed listener'. Singers and accompanists were selected to record the chosen songs from within EFDSS's own ranks, and the songs were classified by mood and genre (Figure 2.2).⁸⁷

- **Lyrical:** 'Searching for Lambs' and 'The Lark in the Morning' (Pat Shuldham-Shaw, unaccompanied); 'Seeds of Love' (Esme Lewis, pianoforte or ensemble)
- **Sad:** 'Bushes and Briars' (Steuart Wilson, unaccompanied); 'The Cuckoo' (Esme Lewis, ensemble); 'O Waly Waly' (Pat Shuldham-Shaw, ensemble)
- **Lively:** 'I'm 17 Come Sunday' and 'O Sally My Dear' (Steuart Wilson, pianoforte); 'Crab Fish' and 'As I Walked Out' (Jan van de Gucht, pianoforte)
- **Sea Songs:** 'Coasts of High Barbary' (Jan van der Gucht, pianoforte); 'Spanish Ladies' (with chorus) (Pat Shuldham-Shaw, ensemble)
- **Ballads:** 'Trees they do Grow High' (Jan van der Gucht, ensemble); 'Lady Maisrie' (Douglas Kennedy, unaccompanied)
- **Carols:** 'King Herod and the Cock' and 'As I Sat on a Sunny Bank' (Pat Shuldham-Shaw, pianoforte or ensemble); 'Holly and Ivey' (Esme Lewis, unaccompanied)

Figure 2.2: EFDSS 'List of Suggested Folk Songs to be Recorded' (1948)

Further lists were drawn up organising songs by priority, recording sessions were arranged at the Gramophone Company studios, and a debate rumbled

⁸⁶ Editorial Board and Library Sub-Committee joint meeting, 8 November 1946, EFDSS Minutes, Vol. 19, VWML

⁸⁷ Library Sub-Committee meeting, 16 July 1948, EFDSS Minutes, Vol. 20, VWML

over the merits and disadvantages of using accompaniment, weighing the potential commercial benefit against the risk of ruining songs.⁸⁸ Dissatisfaction was raised over the quality of female singers within the Society, and the idea was mooted of using a child to record those songs earmarked for female voice. Two female singers were invited to audition to record Folk Songs (the term by now being capitalised in internal EFDSS correspondence). And it was suggested that the Society's singing competitions in London feature a new category of 'recorded voice', in which entrants submit recordings of themselves 'made at any of the numerous studios now open', as a means of the society 'discovering talent' at no cost.⁸⁹

The idea of purchasing a recording machine and doing fieldwork began slowly to seep into the Society's thinking. Peter Kennedy, son of the Director, had been making field recordings for the BBC through the 1940s, and offered to sell some of his equipment to the Society. Elsewhere, Marie Slocombe recommended EFDSS obtain a British Ferrograph machine in 1951. Tape was accepted as the preferred medium, due mostly to the reduced storage space it required, although some still championed a disc-cutting device. Reports on the practicalities of archiving recordings were commissioned; decisions were announced then deferred; a new technical sub-committee was recommended; the idea got stuck in committee for two years. Eventually, the Director decided to scrap the whole project, reaching the brilliantly English conclusion that the money would be better spent replanting the garden at Cecil Sharp House.⁹⁰

By the time Alan Lomax (whose work is the subject of Chapter Five) arrived in Britain from America to make recordings, he complained to Peter Kennedy that he was 'doing the job that you folk should have done years and years ago'.⁹¹ Certainly EFDSS's institutional practices – its glacial pace of decision

⁸⁸ Executive Committee meeting, 3 November 1948, EFDSS Minutes, Vol. 20, VWML

⁸⁹ Executive Committee meeting, 3 November 1948; Library Sub-Committee meeting, 20 January 1949; Library Sub-Committee meeting, 6 June 1949, EFDSS Minutes, Vol. 20, VWML

⁹⁰ Library Sub-Committee reports, 24 July 1951, 6 March 1952, 7 July 1952; Finance Sub-Committee meeting minutes, 21 April 1952, EFDSS Minutes, Vol. 21; Library Sub-Committee meeting minutes, 5 June 1953, EFDSS Minutes, Vol. 22, VWML

⁹¹ Alan Lomax letter to Peter Kennedy, 24 August 1951, BL PK Box 12, Alan Lomax Letters

making, thanks to the fondness amongst its executives of forming endless sub-committees; its inability to break from earlier models of conceptualising traditional music; its general vicariously way of operating – contributed to the sense of urgency that sparked the field recording moment.

As all this was taking place, the Society was keen to capitalise on the Festival of Britain, deeming it an opportunity to peddle the new products of its studio sessions to a nationwide audience. In line with its broad focus on dancing, its main contributions to the Festival were three dance performances at the Albert Hall and another on Parliament Hill in London. But the Society was also keen to use recorded sound in various ways. Needless to say, a Festival Sub-Committee was formed, which began liaising with the right-wing newspaper *The Daily Mail* about a Festival collaboration. A plan was hatched to equip a van with a public address system, which could then tour the country, pumping recorded sound and dance calls out into specific public spaces in efforts to elicit folk dancing.⁹² *The Mail* provided the van; EFDSS provided the caller.

Another strategy entailed producing a box set of 'Country Dance Party' records for release by the Gramophone Company (Figure 2.3). Included in the box was a set of dance instructions written by the Society, and the package was advertised as a 'Portable Party Programme': 'we want everyone to know how easy it is to organise street or garden dancing when one is provided with a Party Programme, gramophone records and the instructions'.⁹³

⁹² Executive Committee meeting minutes, 4 October 1950, 1 November 1950, 6 December 1950, EFDSS Minutes, Vol. 20, VWML

⁹³ 'A Portable Party Programme', *English Dance and Song*, XV: 5 (March 1951), 169

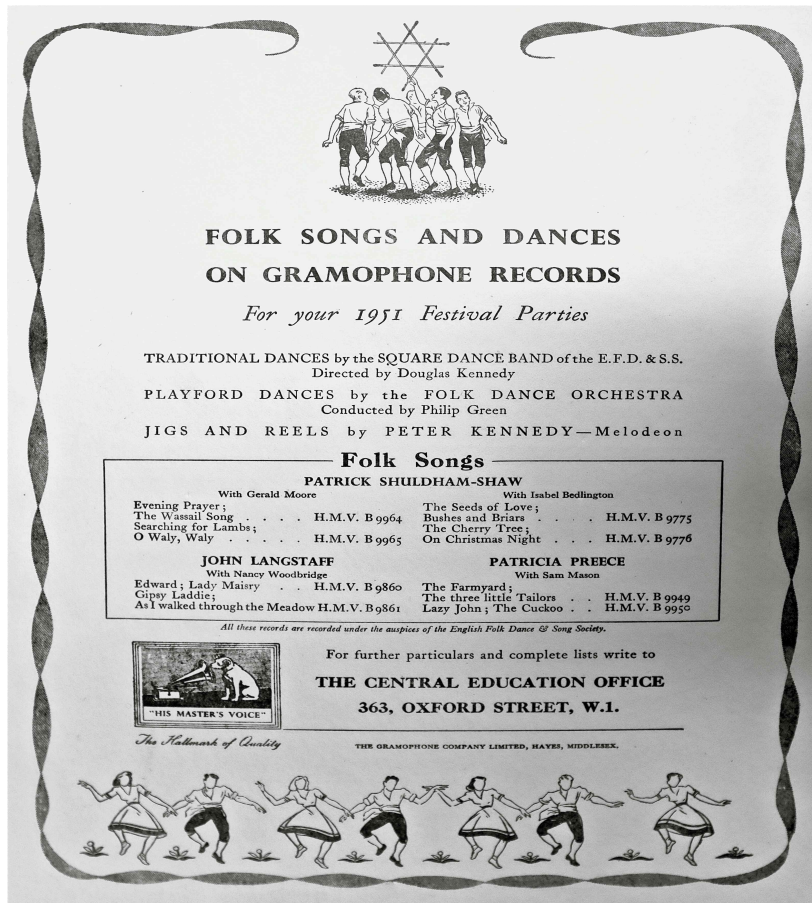
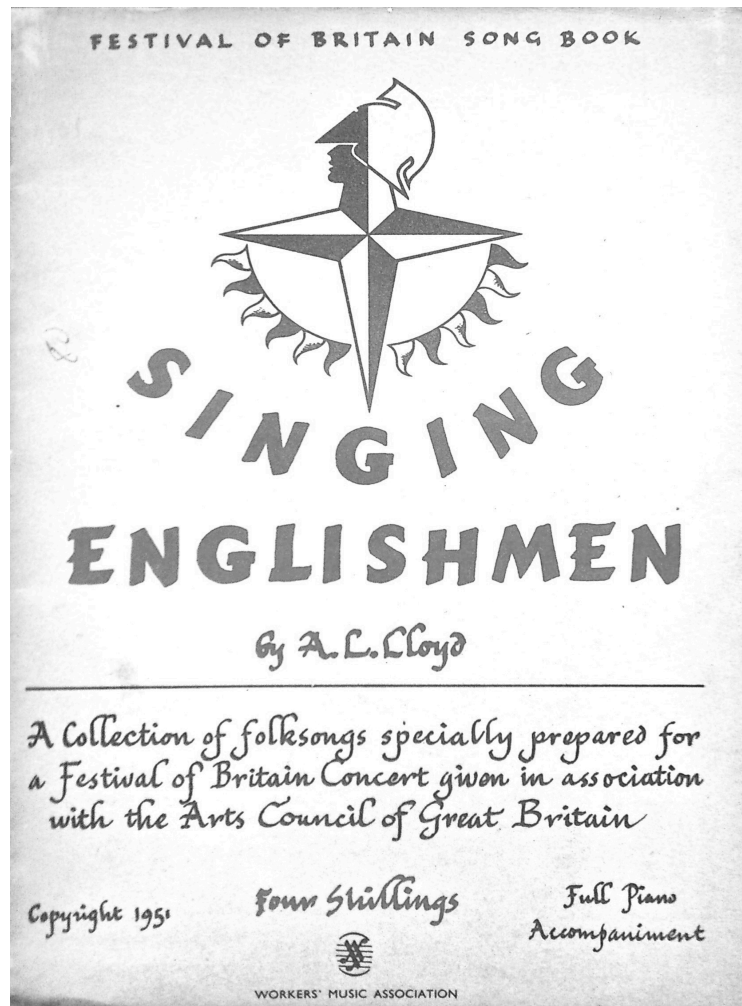


Figure 2.3: 'Folk Songs and Dances on Gramophone Records', for the 1951 Festival of Britain

It's impossible to know how many of these didactic folk discos, if any, were held in Festival year of 1951, but both these recordings and the *Daily Mail* sound van represent an effort on the part of EFDSS to disseminate its version of national music and national culture. These recordings joined in musical circulation with the *Sound Picture of Great Britain*, as well as other musical representations of nation using printed music, such as *Singing Englishmen* (Figure 2.4), a Workers' Music Association songbook containing folksongs mostly arranged by émigré composers living in London. And all of these musics entered into a busy system of objects at Festival time: touring arts groups, touring Festival exhibitions, residents and visitors, who were encouraged to traverse the British Isles. Phonographic representations of nationness were just one strand of many contested circulations of ideas, cultures, lifestyles—all jostling for position in efforts to claim the nation.

Figure 2.4: *Singing Englishmen*, Workers' Music Association (1951)



Noise Abatement

Douglas Kennedy bellyached the plight of folk music against the aural barrage of the twentieth century in 1954, bemoaning 'half a century of ever-increasing noise and blaring loudspeakers'. Elsewhere he asserted that 'modern life with its artificial conditions has weakened the primitive intuitive avenue to direct experience', and that nothing could beat 'the old method of oral tradition'.⁹⁴ Through these remarks he makes the familiar move of positioning tradition and modernity in binary opposition, conflating anti-urbanity and anti-industry with technology and mass media via a hostility towards noise. This section examines national phonography as an intervention into postwar sound culture in Britain, conceptualising this intervention as a form of noise abatement.

⁹⁴ Douglas Kennedy, 'The Director Writes: In the Raw', *English Dance and Song*, XVIII: 3 (Dec 1953–Jan 1954), 78; 'The Director Writes: Music out on the Ground', *English Dance and Song*, XVII: 1 (Aug–Sept 1952), 6

Considering discourses of noise in relation to notions of tradition and modernity, it places issues of class, sound and power into postwar attempts to recover a 'natural', national soundscape.

It isn't difficult to understand why modern life was considered so damaging by conservative advocates of traditional musics. Sterne – via Marshall Berman, Matei Calinescu, Zygmunt Bauman, and Henri Lefebvre – pools together a list of modernity's many characteristics:

Capitalism, colonialism, and the rise of industry; the growth and development of the sciences, changing cosmologies, massive population shifts (specifically migration and urbanisation), new forms of collective and corporate power, social movements, class struggle and the rise of new middle classes, mass communication, nation-states, bureaucracy; confidence in progress, a universal abstract humanist subject, and the world market; and a reflexive contemplation of the constancy of change.⁹⁵

This 'maelstrom' of modernity has been the spark behind many salvage projects, in which sound recording technology has occupied a paradoxical position as, at once, the perpetrator of cultural deracination and the means of preservation. Erich von Hornbostel, speaking about recording and archiving in 1905, puts it clearly enough: 'We must save whatever can be saved before the airship is added to the automobile and the electric express train, and before we hear 'tararabumdieh' in all of Africa and, in the South Seas, that quaint song about little Kohn'.⁹⁶ For preservationists the world over, sound reproduction was both the end of tradition and its saviour.

Erika Brady also highlights this paradox in early field recording practices in the United States, making explicit the metonymic link between the phonograph and the music industry in the folkloric imagination. Moreover, these associations indexed recording technology to urbanity, transporting city

⁹⁵ Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 9

⁹⁶ Erich von Hornbostel, 'The Problems of Comparative Musicology' (1905) in *Hornbostel Opera Omnia I*, ed. Klaus Wachsmann et al (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), 270

culture to the 'as yet "uncontaminated" rural populace'.⁹⁷ Industry, modernity, urbanity, and mass media were all bound together and characterised as noisy. Noise picked up other cultural connotations and meanings in the West, variously being used to describe urban neighbourhoods populated by foreign residents, or to establish demarcations between public and private space. David Novak charts how noise pollution 'appeared to be a kind of waste created by urbanisation' that was considered dangerous and uncivilised, and 'became a sonic metaphor for rapid and unfettered social change'.⁹⁸ The urban was modernised, mechanised, and multicultural; seemingly the worst conditions for traditional, and national, music. It makes sense, then, that when Alan Lomax expounded a theory of cultural equity later in the twentieth century, he spoke of the perceived threat of cultural homogenisation as the 'smog of the phony', neatly using a urban pollutant to describe the effects of mass culture, collapsing energy, manufacturing, and music industries into one.⁹⁹

Noise abatement movements had been brewing among social elites in Western societies for some decades. In the 1930s, as Karin Bijsterveld shows us, efforts were made to quell the noise of mechanical instruments like the radio and gramophone by those who heard the users of such technologies as 'thoughtless individuals who were in dire need of public education'.¹⁰⁰ The Home Office in Britain prepared regulation that prohibited nuisance from loudspeakers in 1938 (later than other nations' governments). And Britain had its own Noise Abatement League until, coincidentally, 1951, when it collapsed due to a lack of funds.¹⁰¹

But noise complaints were nothing new, and had been used in England to defend against foreign threats to national culture, as well as to uphold

⁹⁷ Erika Brady, *A Spiral Way: How the Phonograph Changed Ethnography* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), 84

⁹⁸ David Novak, 'A Beautiful Noise Emerging from the Apparatus of a Machine: Trains and Sounds of the Japanese City' in *The Acoustic City*, ed. Gandy and Nilsen (Berlin: Jovis Verlag, 2014), 28

⁹⁹ Alan Lomax, 'Appeal for Cultural Equity' (1977) in Ronald D. Cohen (ed.) *Alan Lomax: Selected Writings, 1934–1997* (London: Routledge, 2003), 285

¹⁰⁰ Karin Bijsterveld, *Mechanical Sound: Technology, Culture, and Public Programs of Noise in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 162

¹⁰¹ Bijsterveld, *Mechanical Sound*, 189, 197. The Noise Abatement League was eventually succeeded by the Noise Abatement Society in 1959.

economic and social divisions between classes, since before the advent of recorded sound.¹⁰² Moreover, definitions of public noise problems are ever changing, as some noises cease to sound noisy. As early as 1914, T.S. Eliot was espousing the opinion that the city noise of London was not distracting but had become attached to the city: an attitude that, for Picker, shows how the aural tapestry of urban noise became aestheticised, ceasing to work against art and creativity, but within them.¹⁰³ This idea also courses through modernist musical composition and early sound art in the first decades of the twentieth century, in the work of many artists from Luigi Russolo to Walter Ruttmann. In the realms of consumption of sound, too, the coming of gramophones and radios might not have been as shocking as is often claimed. D.L. LeMahieu makes the sensible point that sound recording was just one of many technologies 'thrust upon a population increasingly accustomed to mechanical miracles. In a decade when men learned to fly, the clock-sprung motor of a portable gramophone or the extended playing time of a double-sided disk hardly provoked astonishment'.¹⁰⁴ And many of the more disturbing aspects of modern soundscapes such as clocks and trains had, for Greg Goodale, become iconic and even comforting sounds by the 1950s.¹⁰⁵

Kennedy's complaints about blaring loudspeakers, in other words, were old news by the mid-twentieth century, in a longer history of noise abatement. Or, from a different perspective, they betray a classist hostility towards a sound culture built upon recorded music. Bijsterveld charts the history of attempts to regulate the use of sound playback technologies in Western societies, finding that efforts have repeatedly been made to construct an essential difference between music played by musicians and music played by a device. The counter-argument, often voiced from the political left, was that gramophones and radios – as relatively inexpensive sources of music – had become the musical instruments of the lower classes, so to ban their noise would be to target these classes disproportionately. Indeed, recorded music constituted a

¹⁰² Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, 41-65

¹⁰³ Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, 79

¹⁰⁴ D.L. LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind in Britain Between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 81

¹⁰⁵ Greg Goodale, *Sonic Persuasion: Reading Sound in the Recorded Age* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 47-8

working-class sound culture, in which listening became an act of sharing music rather than making noise.¹⁰⁶

From this footing, institutional uses of phonography – particularly from state-funded organisations like EFDSS – become attempts to impose one sound culture onto another. The inscription and circulation of national music excluded the sonic activities of the bulk of the populace. In more general terms, noise is often simply defined as ‘unwanted sound’.¹⁰⁷ This describes elite attitudes to mass culture quite well—a threat to the existing social order. Conflicts about sound are political: about which sounds should be heard in which spaces, about inclusion and exclusion, about power.

Sterne detects a hostility toward large-scale societies built into the many theories that privilege orality and face-to-face communication through the twentieth century, singling out the soundscape ecology of R. Murray Schafer, who champions the ‘hi-fi’ sonic environments of pre-industrialisation over the ‘lo-fi’ soundscapes of the industrial megalopolis. For Sterne, Schafer’s preference for sound cultures of a ‘human scale’ – limited to the spatiality of the unamplified human voice – conceals ‘a distinctly authoritarian preference for the voice of one over the noise of the many’.¹⁰⁸ In lambasting ‘modern life with its artificial conditions’, and arguing that nothing beats ‘the old method of oral tradition’, Douglas Kennedy is coming from the same place. The ethos emanating from Cecil Sharp House was that people in postwar Britain should be traditional or be quiet.

Quietude was the preferred state of being for EFDSS. Its executive committee bristled against public interest in folk musics that threatened to break what it termed its ‘quasi-monopoly’ in the field, bemoaning how the Society’s enjoyment of a ‘peaceful scene’ had given way to a ‘racket’ of popularity.¹⁰⁹ Whence the fixation on villages, held by many urban dwellers as places that were ‘more or less happily dead’ in the postwar years—death, we imagine, being sufficiently quiet.¹¹⁰ The positioning of tradition and modernity

¹⁰⁶ Bijsterveld, *Mechanical Sound*, 161-71

¹⁰⁷ Bijsterveld, *Mechanical Sound*, 2

¹⁰⁸ Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 342-3

¹⁰⁹ Copyright policy statement, Executive Committee meeting minutes, 25 July 1951, EFDSS Minutes, Vol. 21, VWML

¹¹⁰ Carrington, *Life in an English Village*, 6

in binary opposition has been common to countless survivalist and revivalist movements. A leap of logic follows, connecting traditional musics to the natural landscape, whereby such musics become a part of nature. (Witness the tendency among record labels to place pictures of rural landscapes, rather than musicians, on the covers of releases; or the same tendency among YouTube users, coupling photographs of sublime nature to traditional musics when uploading videos.) The common conclusion, once these associations have been made, is that modernity is a destructive force, trashing tradition as it trashes nature.

Modernity trashing tradition was certainly part of Murray Schafer's theorising, and central to the World Soundscape Project that he helmed was the drive to eliminate noise and recover a 'natural' soundscape. This also goes some way to explaining the prevalence of nature metaphors, often involving soil, found in discourses around folk music movements. For examples, I'll go back to Vaughan Williams again, for whom the 'cultivation' of folk songs was vital to national music, and for whom folk songs were 'a draught of pure water' to refresh national composition.¹¹¹ His take on preservation was that the Society's responsibilities were 'to see to it, as our forefathers did, that what is beautiful becomes even more beautiful, and what is unworthy is discarded'.¹¹² This binary of the beautiful and the unworthy can be easily mapped onto ideas of high and low culture. And it can be mapped equally well onto the desires of social elites to maintain distinctions between music and noise.

Again this has a long history; Picker's research into nineteenth-century street musicians tracks how 'music' was 'intended for those of refined tastes indoors', while 'grinding noise' was for the exterior masses.¹¹³ Such distinctions are shot through with class bias. Conflicts between noise and music animate histories, as Jacques Attali has famously argued, with relations between sound and power being central to contested territories.¹¹⁴ National music was one such contested territory in postwar Britain, with battle lines drawn on issues of class, race, noise, and technology.

¹¹¹ Vaughan Williams, *National Music*, 114, 121

¹¹² President's Speech, EFDSS Annual Reports, 1953–1954, VWML

¹¹³ Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, 62

¹¹⁴ Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1985)

Despite the conflation of recording technologies with noise, destructive modernity, and lower-class sound culture, this period was also marked by a newfound acceptance of technology amongst British institutions advocating traditional musics. EFDSS's use of a *Daily Mail* sound van, and the circulation of recordings for the Festival of Britain, suggest an acknowledgement that sound recordings were useful in sonic interventionism. By 1956 Douglas Kennedy was calling radio 'a new channel in the stream of oral tradition', while the Society as a whole declared its 'modern outlook' to the public, celebrating its 'use of the modern devices of broadcasting, films, television and sound recording'.¹¹⁵ This was arguably window dressing for what remained highly conservative cultural politics, but it also prompts consideration of how the obvious contradiction in simultaneously championing and denouncing recording technology was reconciled. Some uses of recorded sound were advocated while others were delegitimised. To understand why, it is necessary to ask after the values and intended functions that were invested into recordings.

Technological Delegation

The rapidly expanding literature on recorded music provides a host of ways to understand recordings and their effects. Recordings mean music no longer requires a live performer, can preserve and reproduce sound, make music repeatable and portable and private; they expand sound's audibility across time and space, facilitate musical education and develop listening publics; they create the idea of 'live music' and transform hearings of performance; they sunder creation from recreation; they turn music into a thing, becoming commodity, collectible, and furniture; they trigger desires of ownership and they make music casual; they are used for background listening and become background noise; they give the auditor control over listening practices; they sell us stuff. This section briefly explores two other ways of understanding recordings, less prominent in the literature: recordings as entextualisations,

¹¹⁵ Douglas Kennedy, 'The Director Writes: The New Oral Tradition', *English Dance and Song*, XXI: 1 (Sept–Oct 1956), 3–4; souvenir programme for the EFDSS Festival, Royal Albert Hall, 6–7 January 1956

and recordings as delegations. Both are useful in explaining the national phonographies discussed in this chapter and those that follow.

Entextualisation describes a process of converting discourse and social interaction into objects, texts, and artefacts. Sound recordings can therefore be entextualisations of forces such as political ideology, institutional ethos, or even state edict, the traces of which they bear. As entextualised artefacts circulate, they engage in a corollary process of contextualisation, whereby texts are returned to discourse and social interaction in often-contested ways. Contextualised objects then generate new entextualisations and the process continues.¹¹⁶

Delegation has been theorised by Bruno Latour to make sense of the ways in which technologies are given tasks previously performed by humans. Through technological delegation, nonhumans become agents that allow social action to be distributed across networks operating at greater distances than otherwise possible.¹¹⁷ Bringing these concepts to the recordings released by EFDSS for the Festival of Britain, a pair of interrelated points emerges regarding their production and circulation. For starters, we've heard how EFDSS recording policy was part of a much broader set of institutional practices, and their recordings can thus be said to be entextualisations of the cultural politics of the Society. In addition, the Society's interventions into sound culture were built upon efforts to insert their version of tradition into musicking up and down the country, as elucidated by Douglas Kennedy in 1951:

The Society's representatives have still to 'implant' in localities where there seems to be no surviving roots, but experience has shown that implanting the right kind of traditional material may evoke dormant and

¹¹⁶ This idea comes from Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban, 'The Natural History of Discourse' in *Natural Histories of Discourse*, ed. Silverstein and Urban (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 1-18. It has been given excellent treatment in relation to music by Martin Stokes, *The Republic of Love: Cultural Intimacy in Turkish Popular Music* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 6

¹¹⁷ Bruno Latour, 'Mixing Humans and Nonhumans Together: The Sociology of a Door-Closer', *Social Problems*, 35: 3 (1988), 298-310. For a discussion of this idea in relation to music, see Benjamin Piekut, 'Actor-Networks in Music History: Clarifications and Critiques', *Twentieth-Century Music*, 11: 2 (2014), 191-215

unsuspected local tradition which can be re-established within the framework of the local gathering.¹¹⁸

The 'representatives' Kennedy mentions include the material extensions of the Society's work. Recordings are intended as sonic persuaders, having been delegated the task of circulating a self-sanctioned version of collective memory. And what was being 'implanted' was not only musics into communities, but also cultural politics into those musics.

Similarly, the *Sound Picture of Great Britain* operates as entextualisation of the national narrative told by the Festival of Britain, and as delegate on behalf of Festival organisers. As part of Festival planning, official tours of Britain were proposed to provide visitors with a comprehensive view of the land and its people.¹¹⁹ This plan was not to materialise, however, and Festival organisers worried about maintaining control of the national narrative from London. On the one hand, official literature announces that the Festival 'firmly believes that British communities can be left to devise their own means of enjoying themselves', and organisers posited local participation as, in itself, a British tradition.¹²⁰ On the other hand, there was concern that local festivities might contradict official versions of Britishness emanating from the centre, and the Festival's travelling exhibitions were devised to counter local imaginings—particularly those highlighting the struggle for Scottish independence.¹²¹ Conekin argues that the travelling exhibitions were a concerted attempt by Festival organisers to transport official versions of the nation to 'the people' of Britain.¹²² The *Sound Picture* – as a form of national phonography, as a kind of sanctioned audio tourism – did exactly the same thing.

Both the *Sound Picture* and the EFDSS recordings build a present out of the past, locating the nation in history. They follow a theoretical thread – winding back through visual anthropologist Christopher Pinney, postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha, and semiotician Mikhael Bakhtin – that unspools at

¹¹⁸ Memorandum from the Director, Executive Committee meeting minutes, 7 February 1951, EFDSS Minutes, Vol. 21, VWML

¹¹⁹ Conekin, *The Autobiography of a Nation*, 128

¹²⁰ Conekin, *The Autobiography of a Nation*, 154, 158

¹²¹ Conekin, *The Autobiography of a Nation*, 123, 155, 174

¹²² Conekin, *The Autobiography of a Nation*, 124-5

Goethe's *Italian Journey*, his late eighteenth-century wanderings around Italy that saw him marvelling at the Italianness of it all. Bhabha terms this 'national time-space': an innate nationness that permeates and speaks through people and objects in any particular moment.¹²³ But he problematizes this, drawing attention to the ways in which national-historical time is constructed through elisions of doubleness, splits, and social contestations. In particular, he asserts that 'the language of culture and community is poised on the fissures of the present becoming the rhetorical figures of a national past', highlighting the temporal play involved in nation building.¹²⁴

In their materials, and their complicated relationships with time and temporality, the *Sound Picture* and EFDSS recordings constitute a form of national modernity. The actors involved in official postwar British culture were producing the nation through modernising uses of the past, and the pastness of the recordings discussed here were not necessarily out of sync. In sum, and following Ana María Ochoa, tradition and modernity don't exist in binary opposition, but rather mediate one another.¹²⁵ Folk and traditional musics have continued to be mobilised in processes of nationalisation through the twentieth century, existing within and animating modernity. But just as there is a question of which pasts were included in modernisation, there are also questions of which traditions and which people were included in and excluded from imagined national futures. Narratives delegated to recordings were of a carefully delimited nation. The nation entextualised can be heard in its silences as much as its sounds.

Conclusion

In outlining the cultural rethinking that was taking place at the end of World War II, Roy and Gwen Shaw note a 'religion of the soil' arising out of a

¹²³ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2010[1994]), 206

¹²⁴ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 203

¹²⁵ Ana María Ochoa Gautier, 'Sonic Transculturation, Epistemologies of Purification and the Aural Public Sphere in Latin America', *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture*, 12: 6 (2006), 820

subliminal public fear of the destructive potential of technology.¹²⁶ The damage of war remained evident, and the idea shared by politicians, cultural theorists, Festival of Britain planners, and perhaps the general public was that these wounds could be healed through a heightened sense of attachment to the land. Postwar British modernity was not at odds with the past but built upon it, using ideas of tradition, history and landscape to imaginatively conceptualise the nation and strive for cultural renewal. A new word fusing place, history and memory entered the lexicon. In a 1948 essay on John Betjeman, W.H. Auden coined the term 'topophilia' to describe a love of land based on biology, memory and a close connection to place. Topophilia, for Auden, differs from a simple love of nature, as this is lacking in history. Rather, it is history and memory that infuse landscape and environment with meaning, and it is from this topophilia that the nation was produced after the war.¹²⁷

The recordings discussed in this chapter are instantiations of this topophilia; history and landscape were built into nationalising uses of recorded sound. The *Sound Picture of Great Britain* and the recordings produced by EFDSS are stagings of nation, in which a focus on tradition was central to ideas of maintaining cultural integrity, national identity, and resisting mass culture. At the same time, though, the focus on fixed notions of tradition – in the work of EFDSS and IFMC – was implicitly opposed to postwar improvements in living standards, and excluded many sound cultures from audio nation-building projects. Ultimately, and quite rightly, the national phonographies discussed here were deemed ethnographically inadequate (particularly in Scotland, where the idea of Harry Lauder singing for the whole country had long been anathema to many), and this inadequacy contributed to the founding of a flurry of field recording projects during the same period.

Yet these recording projects developed within the same messy cultural remappings at play in this chapter, and so the field recording moment was at once a rupture with existing institutional practices and a continuation of them. The delimited nation sounded by EFDSS and the Festival of Britain contained a

¹²⁶ Roy and Gwen Shaw, 'The Cultural and Social Setting' in *The Cambridge Guide to the Arts in Britain, vol. 9: Since the Second World War*, ed. Boris Ford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 6

¹²⁷ W.H. Auden 'Introduction' in John Betjeman, *Slick but not Streamlined* (New York: Doubleday & Co, 1947), 17-24

set of four interconnected political and aesthetic workings that were carried into the field. First, the production of national time-space required a temporal play that privileged particular pre-industrial pasts. Second, aspects of modernity were perceived as destructive, meaning traditions had to be salvaged to secure the nation. Third, these traditions could only be found in rural spaces, as cities and industrial areas were incapable of sustaining traditional music cultures. And fourth, recording technologies could be used to preserve and represent the nation in sound. National phonography was only possible after the nation had been whittled down to a purified, traditional core, leaving no sonic space for the representation of the nation's internal others, or indeed the majority of its people.

Chapter 3

Producing Ancient Timbres:

The Sound Archive at the School of Scottish Studies

Introduction

As the Festival of Britain was gearing up, two seemingly unconnected events took place in Scotland within a few months of each other: first, in January 1951, the School of Scottish Studies (hereafter the School) was founded at the University of Edinburgh; second, a short time earlier, the hydroelectric facility at Sloy was completed, beginning the provision of subsidised electricity to the Scottish Highlands. In this chapter I attempt to layer these two histories, writing of how the School's fieldwork and recording were organised by larger forces such as energy policy and economic regeneration. Specifically, this is a story of a sound archive: how it came to be, what it was working to preserve, and how it constructed the nation as an object of study. Archives sit at the intersection of past, present and future, exerting influence on what will be remembered.¹ Questions of value are shot through archiving processes. It is thus necessary to explore the history of records creation, locating the School's work in time and place, in an effort to make sense of these values.

Although this case study is unlike the others in this thesis, in that the School continues to make and archive recordings rather than being a historically contained project, it is still possible to place it within the postwar field recording moment. The School's fieldwork was at its most intensive between 1951 and 1957. After this, fieldwork funding was significantly reduced, when the School began publishing an in-house journal, and directing its energies to

¹ Joan Schwartz and Terry Cook, 'Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory', *Archival Science*, 2 (2002), 13. Other forms of memory exist alongside archival memory, of course—not least individual and community memory. The interplay between these different kinds of memory, and the conversion of individual and community memory into archival memory, animates this chapter.

the analysis of materials it had gathered in those first half-dozen years.² It has been said that 'a history of the foundation of the School of Scottish Studies would find its source-material in a strange medley of memoranda, private letters from one professor to another, half-remembered scraps of common-room talk, and a certain amount of retrospective divination'.³ Much of this is ephemeral and gone, and unfortunately even some of the stuff that could potentially be consulted – the minutes of University Court meetings, where decisions regarding the School's direction were made – remains off limits behind data protection.

What follows, then, is not a complete history of the School and its sound archive. It is instead an interpretation built upon the following sources: archival work on the correspondence of, and institutional materials belonging to, Hamish Henderson—one of the School's recordists; research into the technologies used by School fieldworkers in its first years; reading on Scottish folk music, hydroelectricity, postwar Scottish politics, and archive theory; insights into the history of the sound archive through two years of voluntary work there; and the generosity of the current staff of the School with their time and conversation. I begin by recounting the origins of the School, before turning to the fieldworkers and their production of national time-space that located the nation in the past, and the voices recorded as the nation's ancient timbres; I then listen to the practices of archiving, asking how traditions were produced for the archive and how the archive in turn produces those traditions; this chapter closes with discussion of the politics of preservation, exploring the entanglements of electricity supplies, recording, archiving and representation.

Founding a School

The founding of the sound archive at the School of Scottish Studies may date to 1951, but it has a pre-history of its own and is also part of a broader history of sound archiving. Histories of archiving and the archive profession in Europe

² Basil Megaw, School of Scottish Studies annual report, 1957-1958. HH Box 36, Folder 9/12 – School of Scottish Studies Material

³ Stewart Sanderson, 'The Work of the School of Scottish Studies', *Scottish Studies*, 1 (1957), 3

extend back through the best part of a thousand years, involving successive periods of archival creation and annihilation, coming to recognise archiving as a distinct profession, and coalescing into 'archival science' – with the order and logic of classification systems – in the 18th and 19th centuries.⁴ Sound archives followed closely on the heels of the invention of sound recording and reproduction. Columbia Records had an archive to preserve its products as early as 1890, but as a commercial enterprise it lacked a compelling reason to preserve for preservation's sake.⁵ Instead, archives more explicitly concerned with preservation were those belonging to the projects of anthropology and ethnology in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

A timeline of ethnographic sound archives begins with the founding of the Phonogrammarchiv in Vienna in 1899, followed closely by the arguably more renowned Berlin Phonogrammarchiv in 1900. More sound archives were established in Rome (Discoteca di Stato, 1928), Paris (Musée de l'Homme, 1930), Moscow (Glinka State Central Museum of Musical Culture, 1937), Paris again (Phonotèque National, 1938), and, in the United States, the Archive of American Folk Song in Washington DC in 1940.⁶ As was the case across Britain, sound archiving on an institutional level was thus undertaken in Scotland comparatively late. But it had been on the cards for a while, and with a different set of geographical connections to those in England. This section recounts the origins and founding of the School, drawing on recent work that tells this story in more detail.⁷

⁴ Michel Duchein, 'The History of European Archives and the Development of the Archival Profession in Europe', *American Archivist*, 55:1 (1992), 14-25

⁵ Kay Kaufman Shelemay, 'Recording Technology, the Record Industry, and Ethnomusicological Scholarship', in *Comparative Musicology and Anthropology of Music*, ed. Nettl and Bohlman (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 282; Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 327

⁶ Jennifer Post and David Threasher, 'Sound Archives', *Oxford Music Online*

⁷ Margaret Mackay has written the most extensive accounts of the School's pre-history and formation. Mackay, 'The First Sixty Years of the School of Scottish Studies: An Overview' in *The Carrying Stream Flows On: Celebrating the Diamond Jubilee of the School of Scottish Studies*, ed. Bob Chambers (Isle of Lewis: Islands Book Trust, 2013), 1-33; see also Alexander Fenton and Margaret Mackay, 'A History of Ethnology in Scotland', in *A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology: An Introduction to Scottish Ethnology*, ed. Fenton and Mackay (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2013), 49-70. Also useful is Cathlin Macaulay's article, 'The School of Scottish Studies Archives', *Scottish Archives*, 12 (2006), 81-94; and John MacInnes, 'Reminiscences of the School of Scottish Studies of the University of Edinburgh' in *'A Guid Hairst': Collecting*

Researchers in Scotland had long placed themselves within a stripe of culturally connected northern European nations, encompassing Ireland and the Scandinavian countries. John Francis Campbell, for instance, made eleven trips to Scandinavia between 1849 and 1873, and was part of ongoing scholarly traffic across the North Sea that fed into the School's founding in 1951.⁸ Conversations between Scottish, Swedish and Irish folklorists grew in volume in the 1930s, gathering around the shared interest in establishing a research institute in Scotland akin to the Irish Folklore Commission (IFC), founded in 1935, and the Folklore Department at the University of Uppsala. Margaret Mackay highlights the importance of these efforts to the School. She explains the disruptive role of war in delaying its creation, and posits Ireland and Sweden as the School's 'godparents' when it finally came into being.⁹ Of particular importance was the guidance of IFC Director James Hamilton Delargy, and Swedish scholars Carl Wilhelm von Sydow, Åke Campbell and Dag Strömbäck.

Sound recordings of traditional musics had been made in Scotland before 1951. John Lorne Campbell and Margaret Fay Shaw were making recordings in the isles of Barra, Canna and North and South Uist using an Ediphone machine, and had established the Folklore Institute of Scotland (FIOS) in 1947;¹⁰ from 1949, Derick Thomson, later of the University of Glasgow, collaborated with the Phonetics Department at the University of Edinburgh to make recordings in Skye, Lewis and elsewhere.¹¹ Stimulating and stimulated by these activities were a postwar political context of renewed interest in Scotland's identity and the question of national independence.¹² The Stone of Destiny – initially used for the coronation of monarchs in Scotland, before being taken to Westminster Abbey – had been liberated and returned to

and Archiving Scottish Tradition, ed. Katherine Campbell et al (Maastricht: Shaker Publishing, 2013), 229-38

⁸ Terry Gunnell, 'The Significance of the Work and Collections of the School of Scottish Studies from a Scandinavian Perspective' in *The Carrying Stream Flows On*, ed. Bob Chambers, 199-225

⁹ Mackay, 'The First Sixty Years', 9

¹⁰ Shaw and Campbell had also made recordings of Gaelic music and song among Scottish emigrant communities in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Canada in the late 1930s. See John Lorne Campbell, *Songs Remembered in Exile* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 1999)

¹¹ MacInnes, 'Reminiscences of the School', 235-36

¹² Macaulay, 'The School of Scottish Studies Archives', 82

Scotland at the end of 1950. There was widespread discontent in 1952 at the crowning of the new Queen as Elizabeth II when she was only the first Queen Elizabeth of Scotland. That this decision was made without constitutional discussion was read by many as the further subordination of Scotland to English governance, and culminated in the explosion of post-boxes bearing the EIR insignia, as the activities of the 'Scottish Republican Army' peaked in 1953.¹³

So the School emerged into a high point in the struggle for Scottish independence, as well as sitting squarely within what Gary West posits as the 'nationalist era' of folklore studies.¹⁴ Its scope was fixed on the nation, and the links to northern European (rather than British) cultures were again emphasised. John Orr remarked:

It is surely a matter to be welcomed by all scholars, and particularly by Scots scholars wherever they may reside, that Scotland has at long last taken her place between Ireland and Scandinavia in the systematic investigation of north and north-west European culture, a study to which, by her history and geographical position, she can make a unique and most valuable contribution.¹⁵

Orr, Professor of French and Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Edinburgh, was part of a 14-strong Executive Committee – consisting of senior faculty from the departments of Music, Ancient History and Palaeography, Celtic, English Language and Linguistics, Scots Law, Geography, Prehistoric Archaeology, Rhetoric and English Literature, Fine Art, Social Anthropology and Phonetics – appointed to administer and direct the School, operating with direct access to the University Court. Stewart Sanderson, one of the main characters in this chapter, was appointed as Secretary-Archivist, responsible for the day-to-day running of the School,

¹³ Timothy Neat, *Hamish Henderson, a Biography: Volume 1, The Making of the Poet* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2007), 314-37

¹⁴ Gary West, *Voicing Scotland: Folk, Culture, Nation* (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2012), 32. West suggests 'nation-centred' a safer term to describe the work of institutions in northern Europe, which wasn't necessarily 'nationalist in the overtly political sense'.

¹⁵ John Orr, 'The School of Scottish Studies', *Scottish Studies*, 1 (1957), 2

which was formally inaugurated on 31 January 1951 at the first meeting of the new Committee.¹⁶

Funding came from the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland and from the University of Edinburgh itself, and the School slowly began consolidating and replacing existing institutions working in related fields: FIOS and the Anthropological and Folklore Society of Scotland were both wound up within a few years of the School's founding; and the School also absorbed the already running Linguistic Survey of Scotland.¹⁷ It initially did little by way of teaching, instead being more of an institute of advanced studies that coalesced into a folklore department, eventually adopting ethnology as its disciplinary designation. Ailie Munro asserts that the School was founded to establish folklore as a discipline in Britain, no less.¹⁸ And striving for academic legitimacy was thus central to its endeavours.

This quest for credibility had been part of the academic trajectory of folklore studies for some time. Regina Bendix tracks the history of the discipline, considering how a discourse of scientism and 'scientific methods' were adopted as a means of shedding the 'emotionality and apparent imprecision of romanticism' from which it developed in the 19th century.¹⁹ So it was with the School. Links were established with Richard Dorson in America, who was perhaps doing more than anyone in the mid-twentieth century to professionalise folklore within university structures and distance it from the politically engaged folkloric work that abounded during the American New Deal.²⁰ Systematic methods were key to the School's activities from the get-

¹⁶ Richard Ranft and Lesley Richmond, 'Review of the School of Scottish Studies Archives, University of Edinburgh', 2012, 4.
http://www.ed.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.104300!/fileManager/Review-of-The-School-of-Scottish-Studies-Archive-FINAL.pdf

¹⁷ Ailie Munro, 'The Role of the School of Scottish Studies in the Folk Music Revival', *Folk Music Journal*, 6:2 (1991), 137; Mackay, 'The First Sixty Years', 4-5; Stewart Sanderson, 'The Work of the School', 3-4

¹⁸ Munro, 'The Role of the School', 137

¹⁹ Regina Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 46. Bendix argues that folklore studies did not actually shed its romanticism, but instead systematised and externalised it.

²⁰ Benjamin Filene writes that Dorson regarded himself as the 'disengaged scientist': a supposedly objective counterpart to the kind of work he perceived as 'fakelore' represented by Benjamin Botkin. Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000),

go, as illustrated by a list of research topics (Figure 3.1) drawn up at a University Court meeting of 15 May 1950.²¹

- Field study and analysis of material culture
- The compilation of data for maps of prehistoric and later Scotland
- The collection of place-names from oral and documentary sources and the creation of a place-name archive
- The collection of oral tradition in all parts of Scotland and the organisation of an equivalent folklore archive for these
- The study of Scottish music and its affinities with the musics of other cultures
- The integration of anthropological fieldwork with the work of the School
- The co-ordination of the study of Scots law with other studies there

Figure 3.1: Memorandum submitted to Edinburgh University Court, 15 May 1950

Obviously much of this has little to do with music and sound, but a good amount of it does. And several of these activities hint at the use of recording technologies as part of research. This was perhaps – as both Mackay and Cathlin Macaulay have argued – to do with the wartime experiences of Angus McIntosh, a member of the Executive Committee. McIntosh was Professor of English Language and General Linguistics, and had been involved in wartime code-breaking work at Bletchley Park, in the process becoming aware of the potential of magnetic tape.²²

How central ideas of field recording and sound archiving were to the Committee's thinking at this early stage remains open to debate. Talk of

164-73. For Bendix, Dorson 'sought refuge' from the ideological dimensions inscribed in the very word folklore 'behind an unreflected mantle of scientific theory and method'—*In Search of Authenticity*, 153. Dorson wrote of the School of Scottish Studies as 'a paradise. All kinds of resources abound: valuable files, indexes, books, journals, tapes, beauteous Skye maidens, friendly earth-youths, learned dons are scattered about to furnish help'. In Hamish Henderson, *Alias MacAlias: Writings on Songs, Folk and Literature* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1992), 12.

²¹ Information on this University Court meeting and the list of proposed research activities is in Mackay, 'The First Sixty Years', 7-8

²² Mackay, 'The First Sixty Years', 6; Macaulay, 'The School of Scottish Studies Archives', 82-83

collecting oral tradition and establishing a folklore archive certainly suggests that fieldwork and preservation were high on the agenda. But this is contradicted by the recollections of John MacInnes, who joined the School in 1958. MacInnes recounts that there were mixed opinions among Committee members concerning the importance of fieldwork: for some it was integral to the School's agenda; while for others it was to be discouraged.²³ Moreover, limited resources meant that tape was often reused, with recordings being transcribed and subsequently wiped in the School's youngest months. The sound archive, MacInnes argues, was not the result of a systematic plan for collecting material, but instead 'like Topsy, "just grow'd"'.²⁴

Either way, the School appointed five staff in 1951.²⁵ These were not tenured academic posts, but fixed-term positions, with positions of Junior Research Fellow, Research Fellow, and Senior Research Fellow.²⁶ Among them was Calum Maclean, appointed in January as Research Fellow in Oral Traditions, becoming the School's first recordist. And he was joined by Hamish Henderson from January 1952, initially employed on a string of short-term contracts before becoming a Research Fellow in 1954. It is to the School's fieldwork – and the recording activities of these two men – that we now turn.

Sounding National Voices

Perhaps more so than the other case studies in this thesis, the fieldwork conducted by and for the School was of an overtly nationalist character. This had much to do with the personal politics of Maclean and Henderson, both strong supporters of Scottish independence. Maclean's nephew, Cailean, posits folklore and Scottish independence as his uncle's main interests through life.²⁷ The elder Maclean wrote of two reasons to record oral tradition: 'for the purposes of purely academic, scientific study on the one hand or, on the other, as part of a definite policy to save a vital and integral part of the

²³ For MacInnes, some Committee members thought that fieldworkers were 'spending too much time in the field', which was preventing them from their more serious scholarly 'research'—MacInnes, 'Reminiscences of the School', 231

²⁴ MacInnes, 'Reminiscences of the School', 232-33

²⁵ Munro, 'The Role of the School', 138

²⁶ MacInnes, 'Reminiscences of the School', 230

²⁷ Cailean Maclean, 'Kindling Ancient Memory' in *The Carrying Stream Flows On*, ed. Bob Chambers, 36

nation'.²⁸ He thus outlined two approaches – 'the scientific and the aesthetic or the nationalist' – and made his priorities clear: 'of the two I think the latter more important'.²⁹

For Henderson, too, recording and archiving folk music was part of a much bigger set of cultural and political ambitions. His nationalism linked into broader goals of socialism, internationalism, and pacifism; traditional culture sat at the heart of these endeavours, with Henderson adopting Antonio Gramsci's model of hearing such culture as the engine of political change throughout his life's work.³⁰ The national phonography conducted by the newly founded School was suffused with nationalism and other forms of cultural politics. This section attempts to get a handle on how these politics were performed in the field, listening to how fieldworkers sought out voices that could be used to symbolise national history—ancient timbres that were expedient to their cultural ambitions.

'To save a vital and integral part of the nation'. As is clear in Maclean's comment, rescue fieldwork was the principal paradigm in the School's early recording. This salvage ideology was not merely against some fuzzy notion of 'modernity'; as the 1950s developed, a pair of very real developments were perceived as specifically threatening to Scottish traditions. The first understandably fed into hostility toward English imperialism. The British government decided to purchase a nuclear missile system in 1954, and, looking for somewhere suitably 'remote' to put it, decided to build a test site in the Outer Hebrides. In an excellent account of academic responses to this decision, Fraser MacDonald describes how 'the Hebridean landscape and seascape were thus transformed into a theatre of military operations, despite widespread disquiet about the effect of this new "rocket range" on island life and culture'.³¹ Fieldwork took on 'apocalyptic urgency' as geographers,

²⁸ Calum Maclean (1957) in Fraser MacDonald, 'Doomsday Fieldwork, or, How to Rescue Gaelic Culture? The Salvage Paradigm in Geography, Archaeology, and Folklore, 1955-62', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 29 (2011), 327

²⁹ Calum Maclean (1957) in MacDonald, 'Doomsday Fieldwork', 327

³⁰ Neat, *Hamish Henderson: Volume 1*, 256-75. Henderson served in Italy towards the end of World War II, and developed a deep affinity with Italian culture, returning after being awarded the Somerset Maugham award for poetry in 1949. He made the first translation of Gramsci's prison letters into English shortly thereafter

³¹ MacDonald, 'Doomsday Fieldwork', 309

archaeologists and folklorists responded to the impending arrival of missiles, and – worse – hundreds of soldiers with English accents and Elvis records; all of which combined to be heard as a ‘death sentence’ for those islands affected.³²

The second threat was the coming of electricity to the Highlands and islands. Particularly troublesome were the twin ideas that electricity would bring cultural connectivity and puncture forms of social isolation deemed necessary for the sustainability of tradition, and that its arrival would transform beyond recognition previously undisturbed ways of life. The rescue impulse ran through the School. Secretary-Archivist Stewart Sanderson urged that ‘if we are to track down the last vestiges of pre-industrial tradition, both spiritual and material, we shall have to move very fast in this age of mass communication, with its London-centred press, radio, and now television’.³³ Basil Megaw, who became the School’s Director in 1957, stressed that fieldwork had been ‘most urgent’, for in rural areas the ‘whole pattern of life, having varied little for hundreds of years, is now undergoing rapid and fundamental change’.³⁴

Gaelic culture was of profound significance. On one level, it had become more or less synonymous with the Hebrides by the 1950s, as Gaelic culture has been marginalised and pushed to the fringes of the nation by the hegemony of the English language. On another, and as a result of this marginalisation, Gaelic culture was heard as a symbolic resource for Scottishness.³⁵ This essence of nationhood was projected onto the islands along with a sense of timelessness. Sanderson again: ‘of first importance is the *oral tradition* of the Gaelic-speaking parts of Scotland—a part of the world of importance quite out of proportion to the number of its inhabitants. For here we have an ancient culture comparatively unmodified by the influence of twentieth-century “civilisation”’.³⁶

³² MacDonald, ‘Doomsday Fieldwork’, 310, 314. The islands in question were North Uist, Benbecula, and South Uist, collectively known as the Uists.

³³ Sanderson, ‘The Work of the School’, 6

³⁴ Basil Megaw, School of Scottish Studies annual report, 1957-58. HH Box 36, Folder 9/12 – School of Scottish Studies Material

³⁵ MacDonald, ‘Doomsday Fieldwork’, 309, 312

³⁶ Sanderson, ‘The Work of the School’, 7. Original emphasis

Gaelic voices were thus heard as existing outside of modernity, containing the history of the nation in the present. Within such thinking is Roland Barthes's concept of the grain of the voice: the materiality of the body, history and tradition and memory and language, swelling out through these ancient timbres.³⁷ Also within such thinking is the denial of coevalness, or the reluctance to acknowledge the co-existence of different cultures in the same time (an issue I'll come back to later in this chapter). But if it is true that notions of cultural stasis and isolation were somewhat exaggerated, it is also true that the Gaelic peoples of Scotland had been subject to a history of mistreatment and crumbly decisions from those in power. Not least the Education Act of 1872, which implemented a policy of the Scottish Education Department to employ non-Gaelic speakers as teachers, and allowed them to punish children for speaking in their native language;³⁸ or the destitution tests and racism that accompanied relief programmes after the Highland famine of 1846;³⁹ or the general neglect that encouraged emigration and left a diminishing, aging population; or, above all, the Clearances.

In counterpoint to this sense of decline has been a steady interest in documenting and recording Gaelic oral traditions, perpetually perceived to be running out of breath. This sentiment was evidently shared by the School—Macaulay writes that 40% of the School's sound collection is Gaelic.⁴⁰ For Calum Maclean, a Hebridean focus was important and logical and natural. He was born in 1915 on the island of Raasay, situated between the Applecross peninsula on the mainland and the Isle of Skye. One of his elder brothers – one of six siblings – was Gaelic poet Sorley Maclean. Having studied Celtic at the University of Edinburgh, he undertook further study and lived and worked in Ireland between 1939 and 1945, latterly for the Irish Folklore Commission under the stewardship of James Hamilton Delargy. At the end 1945 he was

³⁷ Roland Barthes, 'The Grain of the Voice' in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1979), 179-89. I'm not suggesting here that Sanderson and his colleagues were familiar with Barthes's work, but that something of the same logic is evident

³⁸ Munro, 'The Role of the School', 140. See also Charles Withers, *Gaelic Scotland: The Transformation of a Culture* (London: Routledge, 1988)

³⁹ Tom Devine, *The Scottish Nation: A Modern History* (London: Penguin, 2012), 413-17

⁴⁰ Macaulay, 'The School of Scottish Studies Archives', 88

sent by the IFC to conduct fieldwork in the *Gàidhealtachd* of the Hebrides (Delargy believed Scottish Gaelic culture to be part of Irish cultural heritage⁴¹), where he would produce some 19 bound volumes of written lore over the next five years. When the School was being planned, Delargy commended Maclean and his work to Angus McIntosh. And so Maclean formally returned to Scotland, and the University of Edinburgh, on New Years Day, 1951.

Earlier, when he had first returned to Raasay under the auspices of the IFC in 1945, Maclean wrote of the sense of salvage (and sadness) that animated his work:

I was born and reared on this island. When I was young there were many people here who had tales and songs which had never been written down, and which never will be, since the old people are now dead, and all that they knew is with them in the grave. There are still some people alive who remember some of the songs and traditions of their forefathers, and as it seemed to me that there are more songs than anything else available, I decided to write down those which I could find. I realise we are sixty years late in beginning this work of collection, but we may be able to save at least some of the traditional lore before it dies out.⁴²

Therein we find Maclean's devotion, his unstinting dedication, what MacDonald calls his 'total, almost evangelical, commitment' to the rescue of the culture of Gaelic Scotland.⁴³ For he believed it to be the richest set of traditions anywhere in Europe except Hungary; and he believed it to be in terminal decline.⁴⁴ Yet although Maclean's allegiances lay with the Gaels, through his job with the School he heard all of Scotland as his territory.

⁴¹ MacDonald, 'Doomsday Fieldwork', 325

⁴² Calum Maclean diary entry, ca. late 1945, at <http://www.calum-maclean-project.celtscot.ed.ac.uk/about-calum-maclean/biography/>. Maclean wrote his diaries and field notes in Gaelic, so I am grateful to the Calum Maclean Project at the University of Edinburgh for posting the English translation online (my Gaelic remains pretty shoddy).

⁴³ MacDonald, 'Doomsday Fieldwork', 325, 330

⁴⁴ W.F.H. Nicolaisen, 'Calum I. Maclean – obituary', *Fabula*, 5: 1 (1962), 163

He recorded in the borders and in Shetland.⁴⁵ Maclean's first fieldwork for the School, though, was in the Highland district of Lochaber, where he spent the first five months of 1951. His report to the School in July of that year tells of how he defined folklore, how he determined what to record, and how he set about doing it.

Fort William, a rapidly expanding centre of industry, is the largest village in this area. The development of hydro-electric power and the activity resulting from the establishment of an aluminium factory at Inverlochy has resulted in a considerable influx of strangers to the area, strangers not only from the industrial lowland belt, but from Ireland, the isles and western mainland of Scotland. The lore and traditions of Lochaber had to be sought from natives of the area. It was, therefore, decided to steer clear of the industrial community and seek a base near a farming community. Spean Bridge was chosen as centre. A wide area had to be covered from this base and an effort made to contact the best tradition-bearers.⁴⁶

Maclean, exhibiting his own version of topophilia, carefully delimited his folklore against the arrival of new industry and new people. He continues: 'many tradition bearers have gone and with them much of the tradition of Lochaber. Since 1900 Gaelic has steadily lost ground. Today, there are only a few Gaelic speakers left and they are almost all above 60 years of age'. Language, memory and place combine to give shape to tradition: 'when the Gaelic language went, lore and tradition went with it. Thus I recorded no material from English speakers. I recorded no material from any tradition-bearers under 60 years of age'.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Nicolaisen, 'Calum I. Maclean', 163; Mackay, 'The First Sixty Years', 12

⁴⁶ Calum Maclean, 'Folklore Collection in Lochaber – Report', 25/07/1951. HH Box 35, Folder 6/12 – School of Scottish Studies Material

⁴⁷ Maclean, 'Folklore Collection in Lochaber', 25/07/1951. During his time in Lochaber, Maclean recorded over 500 tales from John MacDonald, aged 75, a retired railway worker still working as a road mender for Inverness-shire County Council

Hamish Henderson shared Maclean's belief that Gaelic culture was where the soul of Scotland resided.⁴⁸ But his fieldwork focused on a different community: the travellers of the North East of Scotland. Born in Perthshire in 1919 with some aristocracy in his background but as an 'illegitimate' child, Henderson moved with his mother to Somerset aged eight, was orphaned at thirteen while at boarding school, then went on to be educated at Dulwich College, London, and Cambridge University through a series of scholarships.⁴⁹ He was stationed in Egypt and Italy during the War, working mostly in intelligence and interrogation, making use of his linguistic skills developed through a degree in Modern Languages. With his mind on Scotland throughout his travels, he returned to Britain in 1945. He went to work for the Workers Education Association in Belfast between 1947 and 1949, went back to Italy in 1950, Cambridge again, and by 1950 was in touch with Sidney Newman, Professor of Music at the University of Edinburgh, and member of the School's Executive Committee.

(An important passage in Henderson's life that I'll skip over for now involved him accompanying Alan Lomax, recently arrived in Britain, on a recording tour of Scotland in the summer of 1951. Henderson was paid for this work, and he later credited Lomax as being influential on the School's attitude toward making recordings and using high-quality equipment to do so, as well as on his own employment there.⁵⁰ Lomax's recordings – some twenty-five hours' worth – were among the first to be deposited in the School's Sound Archive. But as Lomax's work in Britain is the subject of Chapter Five, I'll return to this story then.)

It was Newman who was Henderson's main point of contact when first employed by the School in 1952. Beginning a three-month contract on New Year's Day, he was to work 'collecting ballads, folk songs and folklore material in Aberdeenshire and Banffshire', and was instructed that his 'main undertaking would be the recording of William Mathieson of King Edward and

⁴⁸ Neat, *Hamish Henderson: Volume 1*, 272

⁴⁹ It is not my intention in this thesis to go too deep into the biographies of any of the recordists I've studied; Hamish Henderson's story has been told in two volumes of biography by Timothy Neat (2007 and 2009)

⁵⁰ Hamish Henderson letter to Marian Sugden, 29/11/1951, in Henderson, *The Armstrong Nose: Selected Letters of Hamish Henderson* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996), 59

that you will combine with this the recording of Mr [John] Strachan obtaining from him both sung ballads and general folklore material'.⁵¹ Recording Willie Mathieson was thus Henderson's first piece of official ethnological fieldwork. Newman wrote at the end of January that 'the quality of Mathieson's voice is coming out remarkably well—certainly better than I had dared to hope'; and in March he wrote again to congratulate Henderson on his 'very satisfactory recording, and of course the material recorded is excellent and of very great interest'.⁵²

He was subsequently employed for the month of December 1952 to transcribe what he had recorded, and was contracted again for the same work for two months in the spring of 1953. Then, from October 1953, he was employed for eight months to compile an index of material he had collected to date, with supplementary fieldwork where possible. And he was employed for nine months on the same terms from October 1954, before his position with the School was finally regularised.⁵³ It was during this period that Henderson began working with a number of singers and musicians who in many ways would define his career as a folklorist, and who now occupy prominent space in the pantheon of Scottish traditional musics: Jeannie Robertson, Jimmy MacBeath, the Stewart family of Blair, Davie Stewart.

All of these people belonged loosely to the travelling community of the North East. The travellers were socially marginalised, which suited Henderson's politics. They had also been excluded from the collecting work of earlier folklorists in the area. So this is where Henderson directed his recording energies through the 1950s. These musicians and singers were not merely recorded subjects, but were active participants in the fieldwork process. Henderson reported to the School how the North Highland Stewarts 'prospected for songs and stories on my behalf', and how he 'had the routine

⁵¹ Sidney Newman letter to Hamish Henderson, 13/12/1951. HH Box 19, Folder 2/6 – Correspondence

⁵² Sidney Newman letters to Hamish Henderson, 29/1/1952 and 15/3/1952. HH Box 19, Folder 2/6 – Correspondence. These letters are also quoted by Neat in *Hamish Henderson, a Biography: Volume 2, Poetry Becomes People* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2009), 3

⁵³ Stewart Sanderson letters to Hamish Henderson, 21/11/1952, 20/3/1953, 17/9/1953, 29/7/1954. HH Box 22, Folder 1/15 – Correspondence. Munro, 'The Role of the School', 157–58

well systematised; the women of the clan hawked their beat one day, and I followed them up with a tape-recorder the day after'.⁵⁴ Field recording was a collaborative endeavour.

This kind of networked fieldwork brought about its own tensions. The idea of the professional fieldworker was vital to folklore's drive for legitimacy and its efforts to slough off romantic amateurism. Yet there was also the sense within the School that there was too much work to be done, and that it was too urgent, for the few fieldworkers it employed directly. Basil Megaw took advice from Scandinavian and Irish colleagues on how to 'establish a network, covering the whole country, of numerous but carefully selected informants who would be willing to take part in regular and detailed questionnaire work'.⁵⁵ Sanderson reported that the School had provided notebooks for people to record 'the traditions of their home districts'.⁵⁶ And Henderson built an informal but elaborate network of helpers to conduct fieldwork on his behalf.

One of his longest serving collaborators was Maurice Fleming, whom Timothy Neat describes as Henderson's 'unpaid folk assistant' for forty years.⁵⁷ It was Fleming who informed Henderson of the musical talents of the Stewart family of Blairgowrie. After meeting in 1954, Fleming had been encouraged by Henderson to introduce himself to the travellers in the area, and soon he was writing: 'I took your advice and went out into the berry fields of Blair. I'm delighted to tell you I found tonight two singers. They sing like angels and include in their repertoire "The Berry Fields of Blair". I'm positive their songs are of value and I'm dying to record them. They're as keen as mustard. When can I have the machine?'⁵⁸ The two singers were Belle and Sheila Stewart, mother and daughter. Henderson began sending lists of songs and notes on traveller behaviour to Fleming and his other collaborators.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Hamish Henderson, School of Scottish Studies progress report, 1957-58. HH Box 36, Folder 11/12 – School of Scottish Studies Material

⁵⁵ Megaw, School of Scottish Studies annual report, 1957-58. HH Box 36, Folder 9/12 – School of Scottish Studies Material

⁵⁶ Sanderson, 'The Work of the School', 11

⁵⁷ Neat, *Hamish Henderson: Volume 1*, 338

⁵⁸ Maurice Fleming letter to Hamish Henderson, 28/7/1954. HH Box 11, Folder 4/6 – Correspondence

⁵⁹ Fleming continued to defer to Henderson for guidance on appropriate material and interviewing technique. By 1965 Fleming was comparing the School's network of casual collectors to the French Resistance, with 'chains of agents' passing on

Maclean heard the situation differently. He had written to the School's Executive Committee in 1951 about the need to have permanent trained staff in 'key areas' like Lewis and South Uist; in 1959, as the drama of the rocket range was reaching a climax, he stressed that 'the need is now more pressing than ever. The experience in South Uist this summer has convinced me that temporary, voluntary, part-time collectors are no answer to the problem'.⁶⁰ The twin issues were what should be recorded, and who was qualified to do it. Bendix writes of the dominant mid-century folkloric attitude: 'properly trained folklorists were the only ones capable of recognising, documenting, and analysing folkloric material; the untrained, however, could taint such authentic matter'.⁶¹ The issue continued to vex the School even as recording technologies became more widely available. By 1960, the School was sending blank tape to a network of voluntary recordists scattered around the country who owned their own machines. But, as John MacInnes reported, it was 'difficult to persuade them to record information on subjects outside their own interest'.⁶² As for Vaughan Williams and Maud Karpeles in the previous chapter, people's actual interests got in the way of the work of defining and preserving national culture.

Both Henderson and Maclean sought to bridge the gap between urban(e) academic researcher and rural tradition bearer. Maclean occupied both positions at once; Henderson slightly less so, but he still came from the region where he did much of his fieldwork. Clear etic and emic distinctions don't apply here. Maclean railed against any condescension of 'the folk'; Henderson put human relations ahead of academia, and sought to alleviate the hardship of those he recorded.⁶³ And although they worked in, and are associated with,

information. Fleming letter to Hamish Henderson, 24/2/1965. HH Box 11, Folder 6/6 – Correspondence

⁶⁰ Calum Maclean, School of Scottish Studies progress report, April-September 1959. HH Box 35, Folder 3/12 – School of Scottish Studies Material

⁶¹ Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity*, 194

⁶² John MacInnes, School of Scottish Studies progress report, April-September 1960. HH Box 36, Folder 11/12 – School of Scottish Studies Materials

⁶³ Neat, *Hamish Henderson: Volume 2*, 18, 52; MacDonald, 'Doomsday Fieldwork', 326; Henderson, 'Calum Iain Maclean' (1985), in *Alias MacAlias*, 203

different regions of Scotland, both were concerned with ideas of national wholeness.

We've heard already how Maclean emphasised the national and thought of all of Scotland as his 'parish'.⁶⁴ Henderson, for his part, wrote of his work for the School as stirring 'national consciousness'.⁶⁵ (His biographer, Timothy Neat, asserts that Henderson thought of his work with the School as a 'God-given chance to get Scotland to sing again', whereby 'the nation would sing itself back into being'.⁶⁶) Both were recording for Scotland. But both shared the impulse to locate the nation in the past, believing they were tapping into the deep stirrings of nationness upon which a vital national culture could be built. Henderson regarded the travellers as Scotland's 'contemporary ancestors', embodying a 'vanishing way of life'.⁶⁷ So although ethnology makes claims on the ordinary and the everyday, and although archiving folklore seemingly involves lowering a threshold of what is deemed worthy of preserving so as to include people other than what Manuel DeLanda calls 'the sacred and secular figures of the great legitimising narratives',⁶⁸ the actual process is a bit more complicated. The fieldwork conducted by the School was not about recording the everyday and the ordinary, but about imagining and locating the historical everyday and ordinary in the present, thus rendering them extraordinary; elevated to a significance deemed worthy of archiving, and perhaps not lowering a threshold at all, but instead building a new one.

And, of course, the nation was located in rural areas. Writing in 1957, archivist Stewart Sanderson helpfully summarised the School's working definition of folklore: 'the recording and investigation of the oral and material traditions of rural communities in Scotland, with special emphasis on the traditions of the pre-industrial age'.⁶⁹ Fieldwork was done in cities – Maclean in Glasgow, Henderson at Lamb's House old people's home in Leith – but most often only to record people who had moved from the Highlands, islands, and

⁶⁴ Nicolaisen, 'Calum I. Maclean', 163

⁶⁵ Henderson, 'Enemies of Folk-Song' (1955), in *Alias MacAlias*, 50

⁶⁶ Neat, *Hamish Henderson: Volume 2*, 14

⁶⁷ Henderson in Neat, *Hamish Henderson: Volume 2*, 4

⁶⁸ Manuel DeLanda, 'The Archive Before and After Foucault' in *Information is Alive: Art and Theory on Archiving and Retrieving Data*, ed. Joke Brouwer (Rotterdam: V2 Publishing, 2003), 9

⁶⁹ Sanderson, 'The Work of the School', 5

travelling communities, rather than urban culture at large. James Ross (job title: research assistant with special reference to Celtic folksong) even travelled to London to record people from Lewis.⁷⁰

The national phonography of the School, despite the undoubted commitment of its researchers, thus shared the logics listed at the end of the previous chapter in relation to the work of the EFDSS, IFMC, and the Festival of Britain. The same process of whittling down to a purified traditional core, thereby excluding most of the nation from the nation, is evident. This isn't to say that the School was working to define a single Scottish culture; Henderson compared Scotland to Switzerland in being a multi-ethnic country, and his broader work concerned celebrating a polyglot oral tradition.⁷¹ But the fixation on singing the nation into being through its ancient timbres meant that the School's Scottish Studies were of a limited national scope.

There was interest in the historical movement of ballads across Europe, but the same didn't go for the movement of people. Nobody recorded the longstanding Lithuanian community that had been in Scotland – mostly in the coal-mining areas of Lanarkshire – since the late-nineteenth century: having established two weekly newspapers in Lithuanian, and having established a strong enough cultural foothold to host a Lithuanian Festival in Glasgow City Hall in 1905, with folk dancing and choral music.⁷² Nor the large Italian community that had developed through immigration to Scotland between 1880 and 1914, dispersed across the country, and contributed much to

⁷⁰ Megaw, School of Scottish Studies annual report, 1957-58. HH Box 36, Folder 9/12 – School of Scottish Studies Material

⁷¹ Henderson, 'The Ballad and Popular Tradition to 1660' (1986), in *Alias MacAlias*, 78

⁷² Devine, *The Scottish Nation*, 507-12. The dire irony here is that the Lithuanian community was in the process of becoming invisible within Scotland, and could have been the subject of some rescue fieldwork. It was common practice for Lithuanian workers to have their names changed by foremen and bosses for ease of spelling and pronunciation. 'Lesaukas' became 'Smith', for instance, and 'Ramkevicius' became 'Black'. By the 1930s, Lithuanian-Scots were themselves choosing to change their own names, to submerge their identity in order to become part of Scottish society. John Millar (Jonas Stepšis) has written of the diasporic experience in *The Lithuanians in Scotland: A Personal View* (Colonsay: House of Lochar, 1998). Murdoch Rodgers describes some of the music made by members of the Lithuanian community of Bellshill in 'The Lanarkshire Lithuanians: The Origins and Growth of the Lithuanian Community in Industrial Scotland' in *The Complete Odyssey: Voices from Scotland's Recent Past*, ed. Billy Kay (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996), 19-26

Scottish foodlife;⁷³ nor the Jewish community at that point centred on the Gorbals area of Glasgow.

Instead, Sanderson wrote that 'it is those that speak with a Scots accent of mind that most immediately concern us'.⁷⁴ The binary of national folklore within international comparativism remained untroubled by messy phenomena of migration and displacement. And the multi-ethnic Scotland being recorded required the ethnicities in question to stretch far enough back into Scottish history.

The 'Scots accent of mind' was vocalised through an array of technologies. Richard Dorson commented in 1953 that the School's budget for recording equipment was four times that of folklore institutes in other countries.⁷⁵ In addition to a number of recording machines for fieldwork, the School's equipment included an Austin 10 Saloon car, a recording van belonging to the University's Phonetics Department, and a recording studio on the School's premises at George Square.⁷⁶ Furthermore, a number of technical staff were employed, including a sound engineer (initially Sandy Folkarde, who built the studio, succeeded by Fred Kent in 1959). Emphasis was clearly placed on making good recordings, both in the interest of academic credibility, and out of respect for those being recorded.

But this respect was coupled with the exact thing that institutional folklore claimed not to be. Behind the claims to science – Sanderson termed the School's work 'scientific investigation'; Megaw called the School a laboratory⁷⁷ – that kept politics at a safe distance was an irrepressible romanticism. The very idea of building a sounding nation on ancient timbres, saving traditional culture from historical oblivion, is full of romanticism and nostalgia. Benjamin

⁷³ Devine, *The Scottish Nation*, 512-18. Similarly, the Italian-Scottish community was struggling for confidence in the 1950s, having had a rough time after Mussolini declared war on Britain in 1940, and seeking to mask ethnicity in the postwar years

⁷⁴ Sanderson, 'The Work of the School', 6

⁷⁵ Richard Dorson, 'Collecting in County Kerry', *Journal of American Folklore*, 66: 259 (1953), 22

⁷⁶ MacInnes, 'Reminiscences of the School', 234, 236; Sanderson, 'The Work of the School', 9-10. The School was originally based on Chambers Street, Edinburgh, before moving to George Square in 1953.

⁷⁷ Sanderson, 'The Work of the School', 4; Megaw, School of Scottish Studies annual report, 1957-58. HH Box 3, Folder 9/12 – School of Scottish Studies Material

Filene's 'romancing the folk' is an appropriate phrase.⁷⁸ Both Maclean and Henderson sided with tradition bearers over academic and media elites, but there are brief moments when the rapport broke down. Maclean blasted the School's aloof scholasticism: 'the School of Scottish Studies should shut up about South Uist', he wrote to Henderson, arguing they should pay local informants more than Stewart Sanderson.⁷⁹ But he was not above calling young Highland women 'bitches' for failing to accord with his ideas on the 'Highland spirit' (specifically his premonition that they 'will love being courted by airmen' working on the rocket range).⁸⁰

Henderson likewise railed against an elite he heard as having 'a vested interest in keeping the songs of the damned well battened down under hatches'.⁸¹ But he perhaps glossed his own power as a folklorist: setting the terms of the fieldwork encounter and speaking on behalf of those he recorded. Maurice Fleming wrote to him with news that the Stewart family felt they had been short changed by Henderson's fieldwork: 'As I see it, their attitude towards yourself is, "We gave him all we have and got no money in return". This rankles away inside them and makes them suspicious and even bitter ... to expect them to act in any way out of sheer loyalty to yourself or anyone else is perhaps wrong'.⁸² The model of recordist and community as equals was more rhetoric than reality at this point in time, no matter how good the intention—a disconnect between the cultural ambitions of the recordists and those they recorded.

⁷⁸ Filene, *Romancing the Folk*

⁷⁹ Calum Maclean letter to Hamish Henderson, 11/7/1957. HH Box 17, Folder 8/10 – Correspondence. According to Fraser MacDonald, Maclean felt uneasy with aspects of the School's work and with the general distinction that 'folklore' made between 'urban academic researcher' and 'rural native research subject', concealing a class division within it. Moreover, Maclean criticised the kind of scholarship that regarded tradition bearers as 'guinea pigs' for research, hence his (perhaps surprising) comments about his own employers. MacDonald, 'Doomsday Fieldwork', 326

⁸⁰ Calum Maclean letter to Hamish Henderson, 11/7/1957. HH Box 17, Folder 8/10 – Correspondence. Maclean's comment here follows his assertion that 'the old Highland spirit is as dead as could be', and his derogatory attitude towards Gaelic-speaking women dating military servicemen sat within a general despair at the kinds of social change being wrought by the Uist rocket range. MacDonald, 'Doomsday Fieldwork', 330

⁸¹ Henderson, 'Enemies of Folk Song' (1955), in *Alias MacAlias*, 46

⁸² Maurice Fleming letter to Hamish Henderson, undated, ca. 1957–1958. HH Box 11, Folder 5/6 – Correspondence

Authenticating, Collecting

In this regard, the recorded nation is imprinted with a word that's now too problematic to say without instant qualifications and much hedging, but that was used a great deal to describe the School's phonography, and probably animated the whole enterprise: authenticity. Discourses of authenticity legitimated folklore as a discipline, doing so by isolating aspects of culture to constitute a disciplinary subject. Boundaries are drawn around an ideal culture, privileging some forms of cultural expression over others, and holding everything outside those boundaries to be inauthentic by default. A vocabulary emerges that claims some things as genuine, trustworthy, and legitimate; but at once implies that other things are fake, spurious, and illegitimate. Folklorists needed authenticity to give themselves something to study. Academic credibility was sought through this path of esotericism.⁸³

The authenticity conceit was used to describe the material recorded by the School, both in its relation to tradition (Henderson enthused that 'these songs lie near the heart of the older Scottish tradition; they are beyond doubt the genuine article'), and even with regard to the recording location (Henderson again: 'the items have the authentic bloom of the open air on them; they are the sort of material which can never be adequately recaptured in recording studios').⁸⁴ Inherent to the salvage paradigm is the idea that the past is more authentic than the present. So when Maclean wrote of being sixty years too late with his fieldwork, he was declaiming against the inauthenticity of his time. Which brings about the question: what exactly was he trying to record?

⁸³ Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity*, 4-9; Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 91. It is worth pointing out that ideas of authenticity have always been in flux, changing over time and being open to reinterpretation. Equally, some aspects of culture may have been historically considered as authentic while not being sufficiently imperilled to warrant the attention of ethnologists and folklorists. So the formula for rescue fieldwork was some combination of authenticity, importance, rareness, antiquity, national value, and apparent near-extinction

⁸⁴ The first quote is from Henderson, *The Armstrong Nose*, 62; the second is from Henderson, 'Folk-Song and Music from the Berryfields of Blair' (1962), in *Alias MacAlias*, 102. The notion of authenticity automatically being conferred upon recordings made in the field is highlighted by Mitchell Akiyama, 'The Phonographic Memory: A History of Sound Recording in the Field', PhD thesis, McGill University (2014), 50; and is something I'll discuss in more detail in Chapter Five.

Fraser MacDonald asks and answers the same question convincingly, depicting Maclean's quest to capture island voices as an effort to bring to life the 'sound-event' of telling or singing, with the voice as the means of understanding the social history of the islands. For MacDonald, 'Maclean felt that as the authentic practice of "cèilidhing" had effectively died out, the role of the fieldworker was to foster an analogous event for the benefit of the microphone'.⁸⁵ The *songs* may have been in okay health, but the *method of transmission* was endangered. New sounds were created to represent this history of social life.

MacDonald also uncovers a story that highlights how the power to authenticate culture hinges on technological privilege. Working in South Uist, Maclean and his assistant, Donia Etherington, recorded a young tradition bearer who owned his own tape machine. The young man (unnamed in the story) recorded himself being recorded, then tried to synchronise playback of his tape with Maclean's as the fieldworker checked his recordings were okay. Eventually, Etherington had to request the young man stop 'arsing around'. As MacDonald hears it, the tradition bearer is asked to stop getting in the way of folklore. And this encounter leaves little doubt about whose recording technologies were important, and whose tapes were deemed worthy of archiving.⁸⁶

This model of national phonography involved ignoring how cultures write themselves. By possessing and articulating an 'oral literature', by classifying and performing rituals, and indeed by making sound recordings, a culture is always already writing. As James Clifford explains, this serves to undercut the special status of the fieldworker who claims to 'bring the culture into writing', sonically or otherwise.⁸⁷ Yet there remains a particular power in the ability to create and maintain institutional records. And technological privilege – or control of the means of archival production – also enabled another discursive marker of the School's fieldwork: collecting.

⁸⁵ MacDonald, 'Doomsday Fieldwork', 327-28

⁸⁶ MacDonald, 'Doomsday Fieldwork', 329

⁸⁷ James Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Allegory' in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. Clifford and Marcus (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986), 117-18. Clifford here is drawing on Jacques Derrida's concept of grammatology and the expansion of what is thought of as writing

Collecting was the word used so often by those involved in mid-century field recording that it's easy to overlook what a strange choice of word it is. The bulk of the literature on collecting comes from museum studies and material culture studies—logical enough, given that those disciplines deal with the acquisition and ordering of material objects. A smaller literature on collecting music mostly describes the practice of accumulating recorded music, and to a lesser degree the physical paraphernalia of music cultures (things like posters, tickets, etc.). But none of these studies entertain the idea that recording *is* collecting.

In what is probably the most comprehensive account of collecting in European contexts, Susan Pearce describes it as a combination of inherited social practice, poetic individuality, and politics.⁸⁸ Collecting: a curious human activity entailing the gathering together and setting aside of objects. Collecting: an act of selection, lifting things out of life and deeming them appropriate for a significant investment of thought and feeling, time, trouble and resource. Collecting: as power, naming and framing and categorising and controlling. Collecting: as poetics, a fiction through which imaginative constructions can be expressed.⁸⁹ The sum of all this is that collecting is quite an odd way to conceptualise ethnographic fieldwork, particularly in relation to musical traditions that are ever in flux. To speak of fieldwork as collecting is to have a textualist focus, referring to songs as things that exist 'out there' to be collected, stored, pinned down.

Ultimately, collecting is about value. The value generated by the School's collecting spread in several directions. First, onto the singers and songs: the School's fieldwork in Gaelic Scotland encouraged a local sense that Gaelic culture was valuable.⁹⁰ Likewise with the travellers—Sheila Stewart remarked of Henderson's fieldwork: 'he fed us with a great sense of worth and made us citizens of Scotland'.⁹¹ Across the nation, academic connections brought

⁸⁸ Susan Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1995)

⁸⁹ Pearce, *On Collecting*, 3, 23, 178, 32

⁹⁰ Flora MacNeil said that the School's focus on Gaelic culture 'made the people realise they had something they wanted'—in Munro, 'The Role of the School', 144

⁹¹ In Neat, *Hamish Henderson: Volume 2*, 49

prestige to singers.⁹² Second, onto those doing the collecting: having established the contents of their discipline, the School's fieldworkers were then legitimated in collecting it.⁹³ The collectors are credited with building the collection (for Gaelic singer Flora MacNeil, they were given too much credit⁹⁴), and this creates a filter through which the collection is heard thereafter. The collector can draw attention away from the community they record, even if their intention is to do the opposite.

Third, collecting gives value to the material objects collected. Bearing the stamp of official folklore, recordings could be mobilised towards national representation, and were imbued with the agency to contribute to history. And fourth, collecting in these terms places value on recording technologies, which, in turn, bestow prestige on all the parties just mentioned. Technology is invested with the authority of the School, acting as its delegate in the field. Henderson reported how Jeannie Robertson's house continued to 'fill up with likely talent whenever the School's tape-recorder appears'.⁹⁵ Earlier objections to recording machines – like those made by Cecil Sharp on the grounds that they were off-putting to singers – were completely reversed.

But music and sound have a slippery ontological status in relation to collecting. Always at once material and immaterial; always produced by bodies and instruments, voices and objects and vibrations; yet always requiring representation in some medium, and always ephemeral. Sound cannot be

⁹² MacInnes writes that Lowland singers also 'valued their songs more highly as a result of the interest taken in them by academics'—'Reminiscences of the School', 236. Henderson recalled that Willie Mathieson's standing in his community rose as a result of frequent visits by fieldworkers and their technologies—'The Underground of Song' (1963), in *Alias MacAlias*, 32

⁹³ Academic credentials again gave professional prestige to an activity that might otherwise have been regarded as a bit weird. Munro, 'The Role of the School', 157; Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 96

⁹⁴ 'I feel that sometimes the collectors took more of the credit—it was always the collector that got the credit. Unfair'—in Munro, 'The Role of the School', 143

⁹⁵ Henderson, School of Scottish Studies progress report, April-September 1958. HH Box 36, Folder 7/12 – School of Scottish Studies Material. Maurice Fleming also noted the positive effects on singers of using a tape machine. Writing to Henderson to express his frustration at not owning his own equipment and having to travel back and forth to Edinburgh to pick up a recording device, he explained 'until I have a tape-recorder I can't do much for the School except pass on information and write down any material I can find. But quite frankly I find this method difficult. If the machine is there, the singer usually comes away with the stuff, but a notebook and pencil hasn't the same effect—sometimes it has the opposite one'. Fleming letter to Hamish Henderson, 2/1/1958. HH Box 11, Folder 5/6 – Correspondence

collected. Pearce writes that 'objects, unlike sounds, are capable of being possessed and hence, of course, being accumulated, stored and collected'.⁹⁶ Sound must be converted into a sound object – recorded – before it can be collected, to give it the required thingness. Evan Eisenberg depicts the ephemerality of oral culture very nicely: 'winged creatures are not known for longevity. The really durable things (tortoises, stones) are precisely the most earthbound and inert, the most thingly. So in reality, the best way to set something intangible safely beyond time is to reify it'.⁹⁷ This is another way of saying that collecting doesn't refer to pre-existing sounds, but anticipates their material representation. Collecting is self-fulfilling. Collecting refers to recordings before those recordings have been made.

To understand the collectors and their sonic butterfly nets, it is thus necessary to listen more closely to the archive that both shapes and stores field recordings.

Sorting Things Out

It is too easy to explain a sound archive only through its fieldworkers. This misses out several steps in the process through which sounds move from being recorded in the field to being stored on the shelf and in the database. Equally important are the archons (a concept I borrow from Jacques Derrida⁹⁸): those who establish, administer, guard and interpret the archive. It's necessary, then, to go beyond talk of the politics of the recordists and their exuberant discoveries. This section focuses on the systems and workings of the School's sound archive, discussing how these systems were a part of recording and archiving practices, and considering the degree to which making recordings for an archive shaped what those recordings were.

⁹⁶ Pearce, *On Collecting*, 14

⁹⁷ Evan Eisenberg, *The Recording Angel: Music, Records and Culture from Aristotle to Zappa* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005[1987]), 10. Of course, recording doesn't really set sounds 'safely beyond time'; preservation is an ongoing project. Also, collecting music doesn't begin with the invention of sound recording; people were collecting scores long before recording came along. James Davies, 'Julia's Gift: The Social Life of Scores, c.1830', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 131: 2 (2006), 287-309

⁹⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 2

Stewart Sanderson, perhaps the School's archon in chief, wrote of its early years as being 'experimental'.⁹⁹ This perhaps explains why we have differing accounts of the School's approach to fieldwork, archiving, and the issue of wiping or preserving tapes; it is likely that multiple practices were unfolding at once. In any case, the decision to archive – rather than transcribe and reuse – tapes was made early.¹⁰⁰ And within a short time a set of practices was established to 'ensure a continuous transfer of edited tapes, spreading the burden amongst editor (research staff), archivist, technician and typist, and taking account of the manpower available in the School'.¹⁰¹

Working at a capacity of copying and accessioning fifty tapes a month, the process went something like this: fieldworkers passed their edited tapes to the archivist, who checked the data on the tapes before passing them on to the technician, who copied the tapes and gave them accession numbers; tapes then went back to the archivist, who drew up a final list of contents for each tape, then passed these lists on to the typist, who made up labels; finally, tapes were returned to the archivist, who took one copy of each tape and label, and gave the other copy of each tape and label to the technician.¹⁰² A team effort, then—and one in which fieldworkers were barely involved. A procedure for fieldwork had also been established during the School's first years. Upon his appointment as Director in 1957, Megaw announced that work patterns would continue on an 'agreed plan' that involved 'short periods of fieldwork (generally not exceeding two months in all), seeking and recording fresh material', followed by fieldworkers spending 'the greater part of their time' occupied with the 'essential tasks of transcribing, annotating and indexing this material for preservation and study in the School archive'.¹⁰³ Fieldwork was about producing an object of study, creating things to be listened to and written about, in the present and in the future.

⁹⁹ Sanderson, 'The Work of the School', 4

¹⁰⁰ Macaulay, 'The School of Scottish Studies Archives', 86; MacInnes, 'Reminiscences of the School', 232-33

¹⁰¹ W.F.H. Nicolaisen memo to staff at the School of Scottish Studies, undated, ca. 1956-57. HH Box 36, Folder 7/12 – School of Scottish Studies Material

¹⁰² W.F.H. Nicolaisen memo to School staff, 1956-57. HH Box 36, Folder 7/12 – School of Scottish Studies Material

¹⁰³ Megaw, School of Scottish Studies annual report, 1957-58. HH Box 36, Folder 9/12 – School of Scottish Studies Material

Although recordings were being archived, they were still also being made for transcription. In 1952, Sidney Newman instructed Henderson that, in his work with Willie Mathieson, 'it will not be necessary to record all the songs at full length but to concentrate on getting a verse or two of each, so that we may have just sufficient for transcribing the melodies'.¹⁰⁴ But this didn't mean that sound was of secondary concern. The most modern methods were used to record and preserve remnants of pre-industrial culture (Figures 3.2 and 3.3), at the same time that technology generally was accused of having damaging effects on humanity and culture.¹⁰⁵ This contradiction is embedded within the folkloric project, described by Bendix as 'oriented toward the recovery of an essence whose loss has been realised only through modernity, and whose recovery is feasible only through methods and sentiments created in modernity'.¹⁰⁶ Specifically, recording *is* the modernity that its users were seeking to mollify.

But recording equipment was not the only aspect of archiving that was modern. Methods of archival arrangement – classification systems – developed within a modernising profession and as part of a broader modernity.¹⁰⁷ Classification systems are described by Bowker and Star (in an excellent study from which this section of this chapter borrows its heading) as technologies that do invisible work in ordering human interaction.¹⁰⁸ Perhaps ironically for a nationalist institution, the School's classification system was imported. The Uppsala system was used at the IFC where Calum Maclean learnt his trade as a folklorist, after its Director Delargy studied Swedish archiving methods in the 1920s.¹⁰⁹ Maclean then spent nine months in Uppsala between July 1951 and March 1952, becoming familiar with the

¹⁰⁴ Sidney Newman letter to Hamish Henderson, 25/3/1952. HH Box 19, Folder 2/6 – Correspondence. Slightly later, special transcription machines that enabled quick repetition were installed at the School. Sanderson, 'The Work of the School', 10

¹⁰⁵ Henderson told *Melody Maker* in 1973 that the postwar folk revival developed 'out of the realisation to what terrible extent of horror and inhumanity technological progress could lead ... I think personally that this folk revival is part of this human defence against a gross assault on humanity'. In Andrew Means, 'Scottish Studies', *Melody Maker*, 17/3/1973

¹⁰⁶ Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity*, 8

¹⁰⁷ Duchein, 'The History of European Archives', 19

¹⁰⁸ Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, *Sorting Things Out: Classification and its Consequences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 5

¹⁰⁹ Mackay, 'The First Sixty Years', 9-10

system before returning to Scotland where it was adopted for use in the School.¹¹⁰ Sanderson also visited the archive at Uppsala in 1953 and 1955.¹¹¹



Figure 3.2: Fred Kent, Technician of the School of Scottish Studies, copying tapes for archiving, c. 1960. Used with kind permission of the School of Scottish Studies



Figure 3.3: Gillian Johnstone transcribing recordings at the School of Scottish Studies, c. 1960. Used with kind permission of the School of Scottish Studies

¹¹⁰ Mackay, 'The First Sixty Years', 13

¹¹¹ Gunnell, 'A Scandinavian Perspective', 209

Scottish traditional culture, then, was mapped and divided up into categories devised elsewhere; the School's use of this system wasn't revised until the 1970s.¹¹² Bowker and Star explain classification systems as boundary objects, capable of operating across social worlds. Thus it was possible for this method to satisfy the informational requirements of the specific community (Scottish Studies), while maintaining some sort of constant identity (the Uppsala system).¹¹³ Probably more interesting than this, classification systems are always at work in the field, as the system and the collection of data to validate the system are co-constructed.¹¹⁴ When Henderson began fieldwork for the School in the North East, his work was built upon previous collections in the region – notably those of Gavin Greig and James Bruce Duncan, and of Francis James Child – and was focused on the genre of the ballad: 'the School's research-workers were looking for everything that came under the general heading of oral tradition, but priority was naturally given to these same classic or "Child" ballads'.¹¹⁵ Folk music had already been defined before entering the field, and groupings and categories – not 'naturally' doing anything – worked to valorise certain aspects of culture over others.

James Ross devised categories within categories. His work for the School involved developing a 'comprehensive classification of song types' which, by 1956, he had 'stabilised by a systematic division into thirty-two definite types'. Again science was invoked to validate this work; Ross reported how: 'progress has been achieved in the establishment of a folksong archive on scientific principles'.¹¹⁶ Ross's specialisation shows how the work of the School was split according to genre, with different people tasked with researching folksong and folktale in Gaelic and Scots. So although there may not have

¹¹² Macaulay, 'The School of Scottish Studies Archives', 91

¹¹³ Bowker and Star, *Sorting Things Out*, 15-16

¹¹⁴ Bowker and Star, *Sorting Things Out*, 47-48

¹¹⁵ Henderson, 'The Ballads' (1981), in *Alias MacAlias*, 24

¹¹⁶ James Ross, School of Scottish Studies progress report, January-December 1956. HH Box 36, Folder 7/12 – School of Scottish Studies Material. This delineating of boundaries between different forms of expressive culture was central to academic folklore, but it has also been argued that clearly bounded genres are a construct, or even a hindrance to understanding culture as a communicative process. See, for instance, the essays gathered in Dan Ben-Amos, ed. *Folklore Genres* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1976)

been an exact plan for fieldwork and archiving, and each researcher was afforded a degree of autonomy in their work, there was an organised effort towards producing the nation as an object of study through a series of genres. Basil Megaw reported that staff had been conducting fieldwork according to the 'research requirements of their appointments', as knowledge production was divided up and performed in the field.¹¹⁷ Technologies and techniques of archiving were active in shaping what the archived nation would sound like.

Archives are creators of history, exerting power over memory and identity. 'Not passive storehouses of old stuff, but active sites where social power is negotiated, contested, confirmed'.¹¹⁸ Not the product of chance collecting, but deliberate assembling. Thorkild Knudsen, appointed as a locum in the early 1960s, spoke of the School's sound archive as a 'collecting machine', encompassing all of its technologies and tapes, catalogues and files and staff.¹¹⁹ The archive is an assemblage—always there in the field, a composite of human and non-human parts.

Such arguments challenge the idea of the archive as a depository of cultural materials slowly sedimented through time.¹²⁰ Instead the archive must be heard for its production of the culture it aims to preserve. The firmest hand on the tiller of this cultural production is that of the archon, described by Jacques Derrida as the resident of the archive, the guardian of the documents, with the power to interpret their contents.¹²¹ Particularly important is the first archivist, who 'institutes the archive as it should be ... not only in exhibiting the document but *establishing* it'.¹²² This is a handy way of understanding how an archive – such as the School's sound archive – is willed into existence, rather than being inherited from previous archons in previous times. And Derrida's intervention has played a big part in triggering debates on transparency, knowledge, memory, power and justice in the archive.

¹¹⁷ Basil Megaw, School of Scottish Studies annual report, 1958-59. HH Box 35, Folder 3/12 – School of Scottish Studies Material

¹¹⁸ Schwartz and Cook, 'The Making of Modern Memory', 1

¹¹⁹ Thorkild Knudsen memo to staff at the School of Scottish Studies, 29/5/1968. HH Box 35, Folder 3/12 – School of Scottish Studies Materials

¹²⁰ DeLanda, 'The Archive Before and After Foucault', 8

¹²¹ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 2

¹²² Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 55. Original emphasis

Of significance here is the recognition that there are more processes at play in archiving than mere collecting and depositing. A new, useful (if slightly clunky) vocabulary: *archivisation* describes the front end of record keeping, the creative moment when materials are accepted into the archiving system, producing the event for the future rather than merely capturing it; and before this, *archivalisation* speaks of the choice to consider something worth archiving. For Eric Ketelaar, 'the searchlight of archivalisation has to sweep the world for something to light up in the archival sense, before we proceed to register, to record, to inscribe it, in short before we archive it'.¹²³ The School's searchlight swept the nation, illuminating traditions and making them national, employing fieldworkers to record specific people and specific material.

By 1957, the School had archived about 5000 Gaelic songs and 3000 ballads and bothy songs—over 600 hours of recordings. In so doing, a composite nation came together in the archive in a way that it would never do outside of the archive. Voices were gathered, suturing Highland and Lowland. *Consignation*: symbols of nationhood coordinated into a single corpus, all the elements articulating the unity of an ideal configuration.¹²⁴ Scotland, archived—a stockpile of national voices. Timothy Neat writes that Henderson 'got "the singers of Scotland" to create a musical group self-portrait, not just of themselves but of their nation'.¹²⁵ And this idea of creativity in recording can be expanded to question the ideology of transparency at work in ethnographic preservation. Preservation operates through a logic that posits a recording as a stand-in for a piece of oral culture, but this glosses how recording captures a specific performance, mediated for the archive, 'designed and modified' – as Jonathan Sterne puts it – 'for the purposes of reproducibility'.¹²⁶ Recording for

¹²³ Eric Ketelaar, 'Tacit Narratives: The Meanings of Archives', *Archival Science*, 1 (2001), 132-24; these ideas are informed by Derrida, for whom 'the technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivisation produces as much as it records the event'—*Archive Fever*, 17. Original emphasis

¹²⁴ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 3

¹²⁵ Neat, *Hamish Henderson: Volume 2*, 13. Neat also writes that Henderson's recordings are a 'unique national treasure'—treasure metaphors being a trope frequently applied to folklore materials as a parallel to nature metaphors. Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity*, 50

¹²⁶ Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 319-20; Akiyama, 'The Phonographic Memory', 52

the archive entailed *creating* artefacts not just for preservation, but for reproduction and repetition.

So sound archives are fundamentally about time. Henderson wrote of recording as affording a kind of time travel, the medium of sound enabling the listener to 'look behind and through the [written] records of [earlier collectors] David Herd and Gavin Greig to what the North-East folk-singers actually said and sang'.¹²⁷ Here the ideology of transparency is extended backwards through time, as though the past were actually being sounded. But on another level, making recordings for future listeners involves fragmenting time; offering up what Sterne calls 'a little piece of repeatable time within a carefully bounded frame'.¹²⁸

But whose time? Fieldwork is an imposition on its research subjects, so field recordings can logically be said to be the time of those recorded. For Jacques Attali, recording allows for the stockpiling of other people's time, which then becomes an issue of property, enabling the ownership of the labour of others.¹²⁹ An ethnographic archive arguably does just this—building a collection out of the labour of others, then othering that labour by turning it into folklore. The time of the nation. Yet a sound archive is also the time and labour of the archivists and fieldworkers, which throws open questions of what field recordings and sound archives are. Megaw stated that what the archive preserved was the staff's labours; while Knudsen claimed that the School's recordings 'represent the research work done by the staff', and that they were, simply, 'a fieldworker's notebooks'.¹³⁰

Either way, questions arose over what to do with recordings once they had been archived. The fieldworkers strove to immediately disseminate recordings to students at the University of Edinburgh. Henderson wrote that students 'came thronging around' to hear Maclean's recordings, which quickly moved into new contexts: 'thanks to the tape-recorder, unknown waulking songs with

¹²⁷ Henderson, 'The Language of Scots Folk-Song' (1983), in *Alias MacAlias*, 54

¹²⁸ Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 310

¹²⁹ Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 101; Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 310

¹³⁰ Megaw, School of Scottish Studies annual report, 1958-59; Knudsen memo to School staff, 29/5/1968. HH Box 35, Folder 3/12 – School of Scottish Studies Material. Knudsen in MacInnes, 'Reminiscences of the School', 233

beautiful tunes and splendid texts, recorded on Hebridean islands or in the remotest fastnesses of Wester Ross and Sutherland, were being sung by young folk in the capital only a matter of weeks after being taped'.¹³¹ This playback was animated by what Henderson described as the 'urgent need' to place 'examples of authentic native singing-styles, and – wherever possible – actual performances of good traditional artists within the reach of the young apprentice singers'.¹³² Recordings were tasked with transmitting Highland culture to revitalise urban musicking.

And he went further, declaring that 'captivity is hateful' to folk song, and that disseminating sound recordings was vital to countering the work of earlier collectors of Scottish oral tradition who had written it down and 'turned it into a cadaver'.¹³³ The problem with this latter point is that sound recording involves the same process. Sterne – in an account full of brilliant ideas and creepy language – depicts recordings as 'resonant tombs', offering only the exteriority of the voice through a process analogous to embalming. Performance is preserved through a practical transformation, whereby the voice in its original form is disregarded in favour of a preserved voice that can continue to perform a social function.¹³⁴ (Archives are thus described as cemeteries for these resonant tombs.¹³⁵ And Pearce makes a related point on collecting as a process that wrenches pieces 'out of their own true contexts and become dead to their living time and space in order that they may be given an immortality within the collection'.¹³⁶ There's a close relationship – as Theodor Adorno pointed out – between an archive, a museum and a mausoleum.¹³⁷)

Although Henderson sought to give new life to recordings, his ideas centred on diverting their trajectories into new urban milieus rather than returning them to their source communities. Flora MacNeil reported

¹³¹ Henderson, 'Folk-Singing in Auld Reekie' (1965), in *Alias MacAlias*, 7

¹³² Hamish Henderson, 'It Was In You That It A' Began: Some Thought on the Folk Conference' in *The People's Past: Scottish Folk, Scottish History*, ed. Edward Cowan (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1980), 14

¹³³ Henderson, 'Enemies of Folk Song' (1955), in *Alias MacAlias*, 46

¹³⁴ Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 290-97

¹³⁵ Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 327

¹³⁶ Pearce, *On Collecting*, 24

¹³⁷ Theodor Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 175

complaints among Gaelic communities about the School hoarding recordings, and John MacInnes echoes this, writing of how the School was criticised 'for what was seen as its failure to give back to the people what was no more than their due'.¹³⁸ Much of this can be explained by simple lack of resources. But there were also some in the School who argued against repatriating recordings. Chief amongst them was Sanderson, who wrote to Henderson to justify the School's ownership of copyright of recordings, to emphasise the focus on academic research, and to state that it was the responsibility of the BBC to 'farm back the songs we collect'.¹³⁹ Sanderson also stated in his letter that the School supported Henderson in his 'private ambitions' to disseminate. But he seems to have drawn the ire of both Henderson and Maclean, with his stance on circulation being a major point of friction.

Elsewhere, Knudsen argued that the School's recordings should be protected and not made available to anybody outside the research staff. And Donia Etherington compiled demonstration tapes to play to visitors to the School, whom she described as 'pestering enthusiasts'.¹⁴⁰ Dissemination sometimes sat uneasily with the logics of collecting and the self-proclaimed academic seriousness of the School's work. What these disagreements show is that the School wasn't a monolithic institution of faceless uniformity, but a struggle of competing practices and ideas.

Even so, the School in its first decade was a patriarchy. Collectors, archivists and Committee members were men; typists, transcribers and assistants were women. Etherington recounted her role as a field assistant as 'mainly being friendly, and alert to the material, keeping the whiskey out of the recording equipment, and getting informants and/or colleagues back to base to take their shoes off and lay a blanket over them'. Meanwhile the collectors

¹³⁸ MacNeil in Munro, 'The Role of the School', 144; MacInnes, 'Reminiscences of the School', 233

¹³⁹ Stewart Sanderson letter to Hamish Henderson, 28/2/1953. HH Box 22, Folder 1/15 - Correspondence. Sanderson wrote that 'universities exist for a special purpose, and highly specialised units like research schools must use their funds primarily for the purposes for which the court grants them, or they will get no funds at all'

¹⁴⁰ Knudsen memo to School staff, 29/5/1968. HH Box 35, Folder 3/12; Donia Etherington, School of Scottish Studies progress report, April-September 1960. HH Box 36, Folder 11/12 - School of Scottish Studies Material

'had the contacts and knowledge'.¹⁴¹ This gendered division of labour played out between fieldworkers, but also between collectors and contributors. Henderson recorded Jeannie Robertson without her knowledge, then used transcriptions of those recordings in his published work.¹⁴² And he also had Robertson accompany him at a public lecture—she illustrated his talk by singing ballads, but he spoke of the history and meaning of those ballads on her behalf.¹⁴³ The power to create and interpret records resided with men only. The School's early work accords, then, with Schwartz and Cook's argument that the archival enterprise is gendered, and that archives have never been neutral, objective institutions in society.¹⁴⁴

Despite all this, the moral authority of archives in society stems from their neutrality; or what Arjun Appadurai terms 'the purity of the accidents' that produced archival traces.¹⁴⁵ For Appadurai, the usual argument goes that an archive is supposed to be an ethically benign tool, sheltering the past, and imbued with the spirit of some form of cultural collectivity (often the nation). The archive is built on the materials generated by the accidents of history – the trace – and any hint of a deliberate effort to produce or protect a trace is a taint.¹⁴⁶ Since Michel Foucault's writings on archiving and history, Appadurai argues, this innocence of the archive has been destroyed, and we are now forced to confront the designs through which all traces are produced. This has been my intention in this chapter thus far. But I would now like to open out

¹⁴¹ Donia Etherington in Fraser MacDonald, 'Doomsday Fieldwork', 329

¹⁴² Henderson, 'The Language of Scots Folk-Song' (1983), in *Alias MacAlias*, 60

¹⁴³ Henderson, 'Scots Folk-Song Today' (1964), in *Alias MacAlias*, 38-39

¹⁴⁴ Schwartz and Cook, 'The Making of Modern Memory', 16. The School's history differs from the model outlined by Schwartz and Cook, in which the history of archiving involves privileging the 'male' history of politics, administration and war over the 'female' history of family life and domestic work. This bias is connected to the rise of professional history in the 19th century, which, for Schwartz and Cook, squeezed out storytelling, the ghostly and psychic, the spiritual and the feminine in favour of the 'science' of archives and universities. In contrast to this, the School gave much focus to storytelling, the ghostly and psychic, as well as domestic history and family life; but it did so while claiming science on its side, thus creating a division of labour, and with recordings being made exclusively by men.

¹⁴⁵ Arjun Appadurai, 'Archive and Aspiration' in *Information is Alive*, ed. Joke Brouwer,

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¹⁴⁶ Appadurai, 'Archive and Aspiration', 14-16

onto a bigger set of historical issues concerning the perceived national futures that were competing with one another in postwar Scotland.

Appadurai offers the hopeful thought that Foucault's vision of the archive was too dark, and that we can read archiving as a collective project, with all documentation as a form of intervention. From this footing, 'rather than being the tomb of the trace, the archive is more frequently the product of the anticipation of collective memory. The archive is itself an aspiration rather than a recollection'.¹⁴⁷ The archive can be a tool to shape a better future. Stewart Sanderson wrote in 1957 of the School's early work as a deliberate meddling with 'the future traditions of the country'.¹⁴⁸ His justification for this was somewhat utopian: 'a new Scotland is being shaped, with new industries, hydro-electric schemes, forestry and agriculture. The stronger the spiritual roots of that Scotland, the more splendidly she will flourish. There is work for all in the task of preserving and bequeathing our national heritage'.¹⁴⁹ I will consider these connections between fieldwork and industry in the final section of this chapter, plugging the School's work into currents of energy policy, employment, and communications. The history of ethnological fieldwork and the history of hydroelectricity didn't necessarily exist in opposition, but were entangled in generating history.

Powering the Carrying Stream

While the School was archiving in aspiration for a culturally well-nourished Scotland, other political and economic aspirations for the nation's future were playing out elsewhere. The use of hydropower to produce electricity in Scotland has a history dating back to the first years of the twentieth century, but it was during World War II that it was considered as an energy source on a national scale. The Council of State for Scotland – formed in 1941 and headed by Labour politician Tom Johnston – set up an inquiry into the potential for hydroelectric power in the north, yielding the Cooper Report of 1942, which in turn led to the 1943 Hydro-Electric Development (Scotland) Act. This 1943 Act was intended to reverse the economic decline of the Highlands, and the

¹⁴⁷ Appadurai, 'Archive and Aspiration', 16

¹⁴⁸ Sanderson, 'The Work of the School', 12

¹⁴⁹ Sanderson, 'The Work of the School', 13

North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board (NoSHEB) was founded to implement its proposals.¹⁵⁰

Johnston, a socialist who had earlier written books on the crimes of Scottish landowning dynasties and on working class history in Scotland, was instrumental in developing a plan encompassing nearly 100 hydroelectricity schemes in his position as Secretary of State for Scotland.¹⁵¹ The aim of NoSHEB's work was nothing less than economic regeneration and social invigoration of the Highlands, stimulating industrial development and providing private connections to the grid for all residents. Electricity to homes in the north would be subsidised so as to be affordable, irrespective of real cost and remoteness.¹⁵² These policies were to be financed by exporting bulk supplies to the urban populations of central Scotland. Influenced by similar developments in Norway, Johnston aimed to stem emigration and foster a shift away from low-waged agrarian work.¹⁵³

Much of this was contested by Conservatives and landowners who viewed the building of dams and power stations a desecration of the countryside; but the hydroelectricity schemes were part of a broader modernisation of the Highlands, which included building new roads, improvements to rural housing, and changes in farming methods.¹⁵⁴ The schemes themselves provided employment for Highlanders – from the east and west coasts and from the Hebrides – who, in Emma Wood's account, 'were the first people in many a year to be striving freely in that landscape for their own benefit'.¹⁵⁵ Construction work paid well (at the expense of bad safety records and no union representation) and allowed people from the Highlands to remain close to home. They were joined by workers from Ireland, German Prisoners of War, and thousands of Displaced Persons from Eastern Europe (who initially

¹⁵⁰ Emma Wood, *The Hydro Boys: Pioneers of Renewable Energy* (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2004), 53-57

¹⁵¹ Tom Johnston, *Our Scots Noble Families* (Glasgow: Forward Publishing Company, 1909); *The History of the Working Class in Scotland* (Glasgow: Forward Publishing Company, 1922)

¹⁵² Wood, *The Hydro Boys*, 57; David Fleetwood, *Power to the People: The Built Heritage of Scotland's Hydroelectric Power* (Edinburgh: Historic Scotland, 2010), 29; Devine, *The Scottish Nation*, 551-56

¹⁵³ Fleetwood, *Power to the People*, 30; Wood, *The Hydro Boys*, 57

¹⁵⁴ Tom Devine, *The Scottish Nation*, 546-47

¹⁵⁵ Wood, *The Hydro Boys*, 5, 91

worked for half pay, but earned British Citizenship, and full pay, after completion of the first schemes).¹⁵⁶ NoSHEB employed upwards of 12,000 men at its height.

By 1951, as the first fieldwork was being conducted in the name of the School, the Sloy hydroelectricity facility was in full operation and NoSHEB developments were underway across the north. Electricity was being sold to Glasgow residents to supply electricity to the Highland population—connecting the nation.¹⁵⁷ The notion of progress here is complicated and dialectical: the building of dams meant the destruction of drove roads; increased employment opportunities for some meant the rehousing of others. In any case, certainly the movement of peoples, mixing of populations, and flow of current was heard as bad news for those who assumed that isolation is necessary for the maintenance of cultural traditions. Hydroelectricity was heard as contributing to the death of traditional Highland life.¹⁵⁸

But such thinking again relies on regarding tradition and modernity as mutually exclusive. It supposes that a culture had existed in previously undisturbed stasis. It ignores histories of mobility and seasonal migration and labour flows between Highlands and Lowlands that were well developed by the 1840s.¹⁵⁹ It ignores histories of communications between all parts of the nation, facilitated by increasingly regular sea transport between islands and mainland through the nineteenth century, and nationalised telecommunications such as the 1868 Telegraph Act, which included the

¹⁵⁶ Wood, *The Hydro Boys*, 86-92. Wood writes that DPs made up two thirds of the workforce at the Sloy construction site. Camps that were erected to house workers had ceilidhs, some had musical theatre acts brought up from Glasgow at weekends, films, dances in local pubs, concerts. And while local communities were obviously disrupted by the work and the arrival of thousands of workers, Wood's oral history is largely one of people getting along. At the same time, there were local objections to hydro schemes, some of which involved the flooding of Highland glens. Alongside the bulk of complaints that came from landowners and academics toward the Strathfarrar development in the mid-1950s, local resident Iain Mackay spoke up for the families whose homes would be destroyed by the project, arguing that 'it was just like the Clearances all over again' and that the prospect of increased employment opportunities was 'propaganda'. Wood, *The Hydro Boys*, 104-05, 111, 156-59

¹⁵⁷ Wood, *The Hydro Boys*, 82, 89

¹⁵⁸ Wood, *The Hydro Boys*, 158

¹⁵⁹ Devine, *The Scottish Nation*, 416-19, 424

laying of a cable from the Western Hebrides to the mainland in 1872.¹⁶⁰ It denies the connections between cultures, and the interactions that have shaped them.

Or even if it acknowledges these histories, it considers the latest form of modernity to be overwhelming, amounting to a loss of faith in the ability of people to remember and sustain culture. If the Highlands and islands could no longer be a storehouse of Scottish traditions, a new storehouse was required – an archive – to maintain memory outside the human faculty of memory.¹⁶¹ But even some of the findings of the School's own fieldwork challenged the idea that it was salvaging the final expressions of dying traditions. Gaelic culture, in particular, was perhaps not as imperilled as was supposed.¹⁶²

Calum Maclean's first work for the School, in Lochaber, 1951, drew the conclusion: 'the amount of material that can still be collected is remarkable. There is much more than anticipated. Other areas on the mainland must be investigated soon. It may be wrong to assume that the Hebrides are the richest area'.¹⁶³ Similarly, at the end of decade, Maclean reported that he was 'in South Uist when the first guided missile was fired from the Rocket Range, but what surprised me most of all was the excellence of the new sources discovered'.¹⁶⁴ Do Maclean's findings contradict his assertions that this integral part of the nation needed saving, and that he was too late to do it? Cailean Maclean, Calum's nephew, tracks similar sentiments back to the 18th

¹⁶⁰ Devine, *The Scottish Nation*, 422-23; Alison Taubman, 'Electric Telegraph to e-Scotland: Networking Remote and Rural Communities' in *A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology: Transport and Communications*, ed. Kenneth Veitch (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2009), 728-36

¹⁶¹ MacDonald, 'Doomsday Fieldwork', 328; Schwartz and Cook, 'The Making of Modern Memory', 6. Derrida writes that the archive takes place at the 'structural breakdown' of memory—*Archive Fever*, 11

¹⁶² This isn't to say that the School shouldn't have bothered with its recording work! Certainly our knowledge of ballads, tales and songs benefits from these endeavours, and there are many such items that have since fallen out of oral circulation, lending great value to the work of repatriating old recordings (I say more about this in Chapter Six). The problem, as I will go on to argue, is one of assuming that an entire culture or civilisation is at risk through its contact with modernity

¹⁶³ Maclean, 'Folklore Collection in Lochaber—1951', 25/7/1951. HH Box 35, Folder 6/12 – School of Scottish Studies Material

¹⁶⁴ Maclean, School of Scottish Studies progress report, April-September 1959. HH Box 35, Folder 3/12 – School of Scottish Studies Material. Maclean, who died from cancer in 1960, is quoted in an obituary written by W.F.H. Nicolaisen: 'I could give the rest of my life to the collection of material in South Uist alone, and know that I could never be sure that the work was completed'. Nicolaisen, 'Calum I. Maclean', 163

century, pointing out that every collector in the Highlands for over 200 years believed that the most valuable material was already lost. Riffing on Mark Twain, he writes: 'rumours of the death of Highland music and indeed Gaelic folklore have been greatly exaggerated'.¹⁶⁵ It seems that heralding the impending death of Highland culture is something of a tradition.

Relaying the School's early work as a whole, Basil Megaw wrote that fieldworkers had only been able to 'skim the surface' and 'take soundings here and there'.¹⁶⁶ From this perspective, the School wasn't rescuing anything. But while it's easy to poke holes in the idea of rescue fieldwork, it's also important to acknowledge the zeal the rescue impulse gave to recording projects, and that current researchers enjoy the privilege of being able to listen back to their results. At the same time, it's equally important to consider how the School's national phonography was built on sketchy assumptions. And here, Clifford's idea of the ethnographic 'partial truth' is particularly useful.

Ethnographies – which I'd argue includes ethnographic field recordings and sound archives – are, for Clifford, 'true fictions'.¹⁶⁷ Taking fiction as not simply meaning falsehood but instead as suggesting the partiality of cultural truths, ethnographies are fictions in that they are 'things made or fashioned'.¹⁶⁸ Rescue and salvage are partial truths par excellence. Clifford writes of salvage as a persistent narrative structure, and that ethnography's disappearing object is 'a rhetorical construct legitimating a representational practice'.¹⁶⁹ One riddled with political problems: representing cultures as though they aren't involved in the present; relentlessly placing others in a present-becoming-past; expecting cultures to stay still while their portraits are taken; asking people to conform to an image of cultural isolation that doesn't reflect everyday life.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁵ Cailean Maclean, 'Kindling Ancient Memory', 34-35

¹⁶⁶ Megaw, School of Scottish Studies annual report, 1958-59. HH Box 35, Folder 3/12 – School of Scottish Studies Material

¹⁶⁷ Clifford, 'Introduction: Partial Truths' in *Writing Culture*, ed. Clifford and Marcus, 6-7

¹⁶⁸ Clifford, 'Partial Truths', 6

¹⁶⁹ Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Allegory', 112

¹⁷⁰ Clifford, 'Partial Truths', 10; Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Allegory', 115; Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 311-14; Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 119

Ultimately, authenticity isn't something that can be 'gathered up in its fragile, final truth'.¹⁷¹ To assert that a tradition needs rescuing is to deny cultural and political agency to the people who carry that tradition: investing certain cultural expressions as being of national importance, bringing them into the nation; but at once diagnosing the demise of that culture and thus marginalising it from debates about national futures. Producing ancient timbres meant carving an unbridgeable temporal gap between ethnologist and subject, between here and there, between now and then.¹⁷² These ethnographic fictions result in the narrative of rescue being archived alongside and within recordings.¹⁷³ The School is not an exceptional case in this, but rather part of another tradition. While researching this chapter, I began collecting quotes on the connections between death and ethnology, and can now proudly present a selection of them in the display case of Figure 3.4.

¹⁷¹ Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Allegory', 119

¹⁷² Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983)

¹⁷³ Fraser MacDonald writes, 'truly, this is the hallmark of the School's project: that even the *practice* of rescue was itself a culture worth saving'—'Doomsday Fieldwork', 330. Original emphasis. These partial archival truths have historical consequences, persistently placing Highland culture outside of modernity. Martin Stokes and Philip Bohlman counter this notion, arguing that Celtic music is 'part and parcel of the modern world, the industrial city, the commodity form, and the patterns of rationality and intellectual order that emanate from it, and not as something eternally opposed'—Stokes and Bohlman, 'Introduction' in *Celtic Modern: Music at the Global Fringe*, Stokes and Bohlman ed. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2003), 18. In this regard, it's interesting to consider how cultural institutions in the Hebrides represent the musical history and heritage of the islands. The Ravenspoint Centre in Kershader, Lewis, features the recorded voice of Calum Kennedy looping into its exhibition space. Kennedy – who won the Mod in 1955 and the World Ballad Championship in Moscow in 1957, whose shows were glitzy and whose records for Beltona contain equal measures of tartanry and showbiz glamour – became, for many, the sound of Gaelic music. Taigh Chearsabhagh, an arts centre in Lochmaddy, North Uist, displays the story of the Rocketman Disco: a weekly dance party using equipment borrowed from the army base on Benbecula and lugged around the Uists in the back of a Fiat Estate every Friday through the early 1980s. DJs Ewan Johnson and Allan (Tonto) Morrison cut the Top 10 chart out of the *Daily Record*, and ticked the records they wanted. They ordered singles on Tuesdays, which were then delivered by Gordon Milanda, the bread deliveryman, on Friday mornings. 'Blue Monday' was their most-requested track. Far from being underground raves, the disco's equipment was stored in the police cells at the old Sheriff Courthouse when not in use. Taigh Chearsabhagh's display is based on a heap of 45s dredged out of a skip outside Lochmaddy Hall.

In order for ethnology to live, its object must die; by dying, the object takes its revenge for being 'discovered' and with its death defies the science that wants to grasp it.

Jean Baudrillard, *Simulation and Simulacra*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 7

Ethnology is in the sadly ludicrous, not to say tragic position, that at the very moment when it begins to put its workshop in order, to forge its proper tools, to start ready for work on its appointed task, the material of its study melts away with hopeless rapidity.

Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1961[1921]), xv

The existence of natural peoples is for us only ephemeral; that is, they exist for us only insofar as our knowledge of them and our relationships to them are concerned. The moment that they meet us, the angel of death is upon them. From then on, struck by the angel, they carry the seed of decline within them.

Adolf Bastian, *Die Vorgeschichte der Ethnologie* (Berlin: Dümmler, 1881), 64

Figure 3.4: Voices on ethnology and the death of culture

Ailie Munro has called the School's exclusive focus on the rural past a 'regrettably restricted approach'.¹⁷⁴ She cites Henderson's explanation that the 'previously unexpected seam of traveller lore' kept his ears on the rural areas of the North East. She also considers the issue of limited resources, but concludes that the vast numbers of recordings made in rural areas amounts to a shunning of urbanity and industry—an approach she terms a 'hangover from the past'.¹⁷⁵ Just as Maclean returned to the Hebrides again and again, Henderson made repeated visits to the travellers. And while the humanism of their work is readily apparent, it is also true that the bulk of working-class culture in Scotland wasn't on the School's radar.

¹⁷⁴ Munro, 'The Role of the School', 153

¹⁷⁵ Munro, 'The Role of the School', 152

Not everyone at the School was so pessimistic about traditional futures. Henderson broke rank from the rescue paradigm, positing folksong as a living tradition: 'a permanent aspect of human culture, which will go on persisting whatever social and technological changes take place, and will certainly adapt itself, as it has always done, to changing circumstances'.¹⁷⁶ (He also wrote, however, of the 'urgent work of recording, preserving and safeguarding the native traditions of the people, both Scots and Gaelic'.¹⁷⁷) Like his colleagues he expressed excitement at the abundance of material he was able to collect, likening recording in the berry fields to 'holding a tin can under the Niagara Falls'.¹⁷⁸ Technology becomes a container, giving shape to an overflow of culture. But his favourite metaphor was that of the carrying stream: 'on which the old songs are borne forward, and on which new songs try their luck to float or sink'.¹⁷⁹

What's with all these water metaphors? Perhaps they are a result of the fact that Scotland is quite a wet place. Much of its industry and wealth – shipbuilding, fishing, oil, whiskey – has derived from water; and Christopher Harvie describes the country's 'amphibious situation', wherein Scotland is unlike the rest of Europe (except Norway) as most of its history has 'been a case of water *constituting* routes, with land getting in the way'.¹⁸⁰ The carrying stream has since become the general metaphor of choice in describing Scottish traditional music, generating books, CDs, festivals, and more.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁶ Henderson, 'Rock and Reel' (1958), in *Alias MacAlias*, 20

¹⁷⁷ Henderson, 'Enemies of Folk-Song' (1955), in *Alias MacAlias*, 46

¹⁷⁸ Henderson, 'The Voice of the People' (1989), in *Alias MacAlias*, 2

¹⁷⁹ Henderson, 'Scots Folk-Song Today' (1964), in *Alias MacAlias*, 40. The line comes from one of Henderson's poems, 'Under the Earth I Go': 'Tomorrow, songs / Will flow free again, and new voices / Be borne on the carrying stream'

¹⁸⁰ Christopher Harvie, 'Scottish Transport and Communications: An Introduction' in *A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology: Transport and Communications*, ed. Kenneth Veitch, 7. Original emphasis

¹⁸¹ Bob Chambers, ed. *The Carrying Stream Flows On: Celebrating the Diamond Jubilee of the School of Scottish Studies* (Kershader: Islands Book Trust, 2013); Eberhard Bort, ed. *Borne on the Carrying Stream: The Legacy of Hamish Henderson* (Ochtertyre: Grace Note Publications, 2012). *The Carrying Stream* was the title of the 20th volume of the Scottish Tradition CD series, curated by the School and released through Greentrax Recordings (2005 – CDTRAX9020). Edinburgh Folk Club has hosting a Carrying Stream Festival every year since 2002. The School's *Carrying Stream* newsletter was first published in 1991.

There are two fairly straightforward ways to interpret the carrying stream trope. On the one hand, it does useful work in overcoming golden age thinking, countering the dry 'last harvest' mind-set, emphasising routes over roots, and accentuating how culture flows through time rather than being stuck in one. On the other, it can be explained away as another nature metaphor, lending yet more rural imagery to notions of tradition, and washing away the work of gatekeepers, academics, collectors, recordists, and any trace of mediation. But there is another interpretation of the carrying stream that involves following the metaphor, splashing around a bit, and engaging with themes of water and tradition in relation to sound and technology—and it is with this that I will now close this section.

For while water was being used figuratively to describe the flow of tradition, it was literally being used to bring electricity to the Highlands. And the punchline of this chapter is that hydroelectricity powered some of the School's fieldwork. On his return from Sweden in 1952, Maclean attempted to use a new Ferrograph machine to record in the Stratherrick area around Loch Mhòr and Loch Ness, but was unable to as the machine required AC power unavailable in the area.¹⁸² Similarly, in 1954, Maurice Fleming wrote to Henderson about a recently abandoned recording session with the Stewart family: 'Mr Sanderson could only give me a Ferrograph which I've never used and which needs electricity which one of the families I was to record hasn't got'.¹⁸³

Battery-powered recording machines were used for many aspects of the School's work (Figure 3.5). Indeed, Henderson's initial contract stated that 'the main foreseeable expenses will be your travel by bus or bicycle, the charging of batteries and hospitality provided by you to singers'.¹⁸⁴ The battery is an

¹⁸² Cailean Maclean, 'Kindling Ancient Memory', 41

¹⁸³ Maurice Fleming letter to Hamish Henderson, 30/12/1954. HH Box 11, Folder 6/6 – Correspondence. Later, Fleming and Henderson were in correspondence to arrange a recording session with Martha Reid—a singer nicknamed 'Old Peasie' who lived in Birnam in Perthshire. Same problem: 'the Reids don't have electricity and I just don't know how you're going to get round this'—Maurice Fleming letter to Hamish Henderson, 22/2/1957. HH Box 11, Folder 6/6 – Correspondence

¹⁸⁴ Sidney Newman letter to Hamish Henderson, 13/12/1951. HH Box 19, Folder 26 – Correspondence

important protagonist in the history of field recording. But Sanderson explains how the School had several types of machines for different purposes:

The machines capable of making high quality recordings are not, unfortunately of any use in areas where there is no electric power supply: so in addition to the large machines are smaller tape recorders operated by accumulators or dry battery packs. The more expensive of these machines, where not only the recording mechanisms but also the motors for driving the tape are electrically powered, give a fairly high level of quality: but the older machines, where the tape is driven by a clockwork motor, are of little use for music or song, though adequate for speech.¹⁸⁵

Technological limitations meant that recording music and song was a particular problem in the School's early years, and electricity helped in solving this problem. So while the coming of electricity to the Highlands was heard as a threat to tradition, it was also facilitating the recording and archiving of those traditions.

¹⁸⁵ Sanderson, 'The Work of the School', 10



Figure 3.5: EMI Portable and Reporter battery-operated machines, used by School of Scottish Studies fieldworkers in the early 1950s. Photographs by the author (with thanks to Stuart Robinson for providing access to this equipment)

Another way of putting this is that hydroelectricity helped bring the carrying stream into being. Energy policies designed to unify the nation through subsidised power were held as the same forces that were weakening national culture. NoSHEB's damming to generate power encouraged the School's damming of traditions in its archive. But it also *enabled* the recording of musics, and it can be said that through this archiving the School wasn't capturing but producing its object. MacDonald makes a similar argument in relation to various kinds of fieldwork underway in the Hebrides in the 1950s, arguing that salvage doesn't result in the death of its object of study, but that it

instead constructs it.¹⁸⁶ Oral and musical traditions – folklore – are brought into being through fieldwork, through the emphasis on particular texts and types of performance designed for the archive.¹⁸⁷

We could extend MacDonald's argument. By producing several such traditions, bringing them together in the archive, and rendering them monumental, the School produced national culture, Scottish Studies, the nation. The carrying stream is a product of these productions and groupings. Moreover, in shifting the storage of music from bodies to magnetic tape, field recording altered the physical nature and the medium of its signal.¹⁸⁸ This is the definition of transduction, as given by the *Oxford English Dictionary* and cited by Stefan Helmreich in an account of underwater soundscapes.¹⁸⁹ And a quick dip into Helmreich's transductive ethnography helps to make sense of technology and tradition.

The underwater realm, he writes, 'is not a soundscape for people unless such prosthetic technologies are made available to our naked ears'.¹⁹⁰ It takes technical and cultural translation to enable humans to listen underwater; mediation is necessary to hear. And while of course I'm not taking the idea of the carrying stream literally, in that the sounds it carries are actually subaqueous, I'd argue that it exists through a similar process of transduction. The School's recording and archiving transduces meaning from one social world to another, just as hydroelectricity converts one form of energy into another.¹⁹¹ Which is to say that the carrying stream is contingent upon

¹⁸⁶ MacDonald, 'Doomsday Fieldwork', 313, 321-22. The argument here is not that archaeologists fabricated the valuable prehistoric remains of wheelhouses, but that they brought it into being through fieldwork, rendering monumental what might previously have been a pile of stones, and leaving behind the imprint of modern fieldwork as much as the trace of an ancient dwelling. Likewise with field recording: the recordists didn't invent the traditions they recorded, but brought them into being through modern technologies and methods

¹⁸⁷ MacDonald, 'Doomsday Fieldwork', 328

¹⁸⁸ On the storage of music, see Shuhei Hosokawa, *The Aesthetics of Recorded Sound* (Tokyo: Keisō Shobō, 1990), 9

¹⁸⁹ Stefan Helmreich, 'An Anthropologist Underwater: Immersive Soundscapes, Submarine Cyborgs, and Transductive Ethnography', *American Ethnologist*, 34: 4 (2007), 622

¹⁹⁰ Helmreich, 'An Anthropologist Underwater', 624

¹⁹¹ I take my lead here from Michael Silverstein, who has argued that we should imagine the work of rendering meaning from one milieu to another as transduction. In Helmreich, 'An Anthropologist Underwater', 627

recording to be audible; that we can only hear it through technology. Which is to say that the School's sound archive is not a collection of pre-existing sounds and traditions, but a production of national phonography.

Conclusion

Connecting the founding of the School's sound archive to the nationalisation of hydroelectricity in Scotland results in a knotty history. While I can't claim to have untangled this knot in this chapter, I have attempted to show that the knot is there, that it exists. I have attempted to show how binary histories of heroic salvage in the face of destructive, sweeping modernity – or of triumphalist accounts of rising living standards ('you've never had it so good'), conflating the ability to own a fridge with the acquisition of political agency – don't adequately capture the messiness of postwar cultural developments in Scotland. Certainly the successes of hydroelectricity were limited. The arrival of electricity didn't compensate for the continuing lack of employment opportunities once the dams were built and the tunnels dug. Local residents knew, according to Emma Wood, that the economic benefits of NoSHEB schemes wouldn't last; that things would go back to normal once the ribbons were cut and the labour force moved on.¹⁹²

This is why I've attempted to show the flaws in the logic of the School's rescue fieldwork, that hinged on the idea that culture had to be gathered up and stockpiled before it was gone forever. This was a common ethnological assumption in mid-century and before, but was a rhetorical construct that activated value systems of authenticity and collecting (constructing expressive culture as a series of text-objects and genres, typical of folkloric fieldwork and archiving of the time), and legitimated a bunch of questionable political practices (placing traditional cultures exclusively in the past, thereby restricting their agency in the present, and expecting them to conform to images of isolation that deny cultural connections and exchanges).¹⁹³ And is

¹⁹² Wood, *The Hydro Boys*, 115-16

¹⁹³ My critique here is not intended to single out or denounce the work undertaken at the School in the 1950s; any alternatives to salvage ethnology – to gathering up and stockpiling culture – would have been completely out of sync with the dominant European folkloric frameworks of the time. The School's work has evolved with, and informed, these frameworks in the intervening decades. Moreover, it is important to

therefore why I've attempted to show how the School's field recordings were produced for the archive—productions in which recordists, singers, musicians, archons, technologies, energy policies and classification systems all played a part. Field recording and sound archiving in postwar Scotland produced those national musical traditions, those ancient timbres, as much as they preserved them.

The cultural anxieties that animated the School were being projected onto one particular medium in Scotland and across Europe. Radio had been around for a while; by the early 1930s, over 300,000 people in Scotland had purchased wireless receiving licenses.¹⁹⁴ Battery-powered sets were used where there was no electricity supply. And by the 1950s, radio was firmly established as part of everyday life across Scotland. The Minister of Canisbay in Caithness reported in 1952 how 'the introduction of radio receiving sets has to some extent revolutionised the social life of the community ... the events of the world come as quickly to the cottar as to the court, and are discussed with eagerness in the most out-of-way crofter's dwellings'.¹⁹⁵ For some, this was a 'great advance on the old days'; while for others, radio was hastening the decline of traditional culture.¹⁹⁶

Tradition bearers were drawn to radio, and folklorists treated the medium with ambivalence. Henderson, for instance, denounced the 'daily barrage' of radio, designed to 'debauch the listener, and induce in him a state of mind in which he actually prefers the second-hand to the first-hand'.¹⁹⁷ But at the same time he heard radio as an opportunity to circulate traditional musics. Broadcasting could be an ally of oral culture, and even part of the folk

recognise that the School's archive, even with double the resources it was running with, could not have documented the entirety of Scottish culture in mid-century, as such a thing is impossible. I return to this point in Chapter Six

¹⁹⁴ Bill McDowell, 'Radio' in *A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology: Transport and Communications*, ed. Kenneth Veitch, 751

¹⁹⁵ In McDowell, 'Radio', 757-58

¹⁹⁶ These are the opinions of a correspondent from Caerlaverock in Dumfriesshire in 1956, and the Minister for Assynt in Sutherland in 1954, for whom 'the advent of the daily newspaper and the wireless account more than anything else for the disappearance of the "ceilidh" house in every village where the news of the day was related by someone who had perused yesterday's *Glasgow Herald* or *Scotsman*, and then very keenly discussed by the gathering present'—in McDowell, 'Radio', 758

¹⁹⁷ Henderson in Neat, *Hamish Henderson: Volume 2*, 35

process.¹⁹⁸ These same ambivalences were playing out within the BBC, to whose postwar work we will now tune in.

¹⁹⁸ Henderson, 'Rock and Reel' (1958), in *Alias MacAlias*, 20, 22

Chapter 4

Securing the Aural Border:

The BBC Folk Music and Dialect Recording Scheme

It is an important continuing objective of British broadcasting that the programmes should be firmly British in character, and should, by reflecting our national environment and characteristics, have the effect of encouraging and consolidating listeners in the feeling for British speech, culture and institutions.

– William B. Haley, BBC Director General, 1945¹

Introduction

It's fun to picture Haley with his radio, listening and fretting and asking himself: How British is it? Is its Britishness firm enough? Or too wobbly? But embedded within this scenario is a set of more serious questions about sound and the construction of nations: How do broadcast sounds come to index nationness? How is listening conditioned as a national activity? What labours are involved in performing nationalism through an international medium? What gets left out, excluded, repressed, silenced? This chapter tells two stories that address these questions—both telling of how sound was at once nationalised and nationalising, and both centring on perceived problems of interference.

The first, and main, story is one of how the BBC used fieldwork to create a version of the nation for broadcasting, retracing the BBC Folk Music and Dialect Recording Scheme (1952-57; hereafter the Scheme). The second story is one of institutional efforts to combat interference through international technical regimes and emphasis on fidelity in transmission. The voice of the nation was constructed in terms of purity against outside influence; the management of transnational wavelengths was conceived along

¹ William Haley memo to BBC programme controllers, 26/1/1945. BBC WAC, R34/420

lines of national radio manners in tuning out foreign sounds; and an onus was placed on listeners to have high quality radio sets in order to hear the nation correctly. I frame this as a process of *securing the aural border*. These practices fed into a much larger program of delimiting acoustic national identity.² And they describe a form of nation building specific to the medium of radio.

Writing about radio means taking account of voice. More precisely, it means taking account of the confluence of voices that exist behind those that are transmitted. I thus follow Josephine Dolan's argument: 'the moment of transmission is not a spontaneous event isolated from the ideological structures of the BBC. Rather it is a highly orchestrated production that is fully located within the complex relationships that play out between the BBC, its personnel, its imagined audience and its empirical audience'.³ But there is plenty of stuff that can be added to Dolan's network—stuff that connects and mediates those voices, allowing them to speak to each other. Protagonists in this chapter include recording machines and microphones, car batteries, radio transmitters and receivers, wavelengths and magazines, amongst others.

National broadcasting was never just national, but was constantly caught up in a dialectic between the national and international.⁴ Nation building was again performed through international cooperation and collaboration. Here, I listen to how national phonography followed the same logics as discussed in the preceding chapters, and was employed to position Britain as exceptional within, or even separate from, the rest of Europe: combining research into the Scheme at the BBC Written Archives Centre; research into one of its key fieldworkers at the British Library's World and Traditional Music archives; reading the BBC's print mouthpiece, *The Radio Times*, through the early 1950s

² These ideas are informed by recent work in sound studies, specifically: Josh Kun, 'The Aural Border', *Theatre Journal*, 52 (2000), 1-21; and Carolyn Birdsall, *Nazi Soundscapes: Sound, Technology and Urban Space in Germany, 1933-1945* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 103

³ Josephine Dolan, 'The Voice that Cannot Be Heard: Radio/Broadcasting and "The Archive"', *The Radio Journal*, 1: 1 (2003), 69

⁴ Alexander Badenoch et al, ed. *Airy Curtains in the European Ether: Broadcasting and the Cold War* (Baden-Baden, Nomos, 2013); Kate Lacey, 'Radio in the Great Depression: Promotional Culture, Public Service, and Propaganda' in *Radio Reader: Essays in the Cultural History of Radio*, ed. Hilmes and Loviglio (New York: Routledge, 2002), 21-40

to see how problems of interference were presented to the public; and reading on the history and politics of national and international broadcasting.

Field recordings and wavelengths were both delegated the task of circulating the nation, becoming entangled and flowing together out of people's radios in postwar Britain. This chapter traces the sifting and sorting of institutional nation building by turning, first, to radio's internationalisms, before locating the Scheme as a site of messy national consolidation. I then attend to the mediations and medialities of radio fieldwork and broadcast. Finally, the BBC's shaping of listening collectivities takes us to the points at which the Scheme crosses with other means of securing the aural border.

The Stuff of Radio

Rudolf Arnheim called it 'the great miracle of wireless': 'The omnipresence of what people are singing or saying anywhere, the overleaping of frontiers, the conquest of spatial isolation, the importation of culture on the waves of the ether, the same fare for all, sound in silence'.⁵ Much was made of radio's ability to collapse distance. Internationalism was the basis of a form of media humanism: an International Broadcasting Union (IBU) was formed in 1925, basing its headquarters in Geneva so as to align itself with other international and intergovernmental organisations like the League of Nations. The IBU foundation charter was even signed in the League of Nations building, in a ceremony that, for Andreas Fickers, 'attested to the vision of broadcasting as an instrument of peaceful purposes'.⁶ IBU members heard in radio a means of transcendence: of the nationalisms inherent in national broadcasting, of class and territorial boundaries, in the pursuit of international understanding through techno-political diplomacy.

At the same time, radio developed in what Michele Hilmes calls an 'era of nationalisms', and radio as 'national service' was the dominant model of interwar European broadcasting.⁷ Traversing these nationalisms and

⁵ Rudolf Arnheim, *Radio* (London: Faber and Faber, 1933), 14

⁶ Andreas Fickers, 'Visibly Audible: The Radio Dial as Mediating Interface' in *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies*, ed. Pinch and Bijsterveld (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 419

⁷ Michele Hilmes, 'Foreword: Transnational Radio in the Global Age', *Journal of Radio Studies*, 11: 1 (2004), iii-iv

internationalisms, and central to the work of the IBU, were a series of frequency plans, whereby available wavelengths were allocated to national broadcasters. By carving up and portioning out the ether, the IBU sought to counter interference and contribute to European peace.⁸ But these technical regimes served to emphasise national broadcasting spaces, and delegitimise international broadcasting.⁹

The end of World War II brought a renewed enthusiasm for international broadcasting. Julian Huxley, the first Director General of UNESCO, lumped radio in with museums and libraries as 'servicing agencies for man's higher activities', deeming it one of UNESCO's earliest aims that 'barriers to free, easy, and undistorted dissemination of news and knowledge between nations' be removed.¹⁰ Elsewhere, Douglas Kennedy of the English Folk Dance and Song Society marvelled that 'tuning into almost any wavelength one may encounter a folk song or folk dance tune bearing the stamp of its national character and identifying the country of origin'.¹¹ In each case, the unit of humanism, the *thing to be communicated*, was the nation. Broadcast sounds were invested with national qualities.

This heady blend of humanism and techno-politics was also a feature of the aesthetics of radio: mass communication fusing with art, social and technological progress combining. Early treatises by Arnheim and by Lance Sieveking speak of building sound pictures, appealing to the listener's inner eye, welding music, sound and speech into a single material, and presenting the world to the ear.¹² This was the 'stuff of radio'. And the stuff of radio met with what Walter Benjamin terms the 'spirit of radio' – putting 'as many people as possible in front of a microphone on every possible occasion' – in the

⁸ Suzanne Lommers, *Europe – On Air: Interwar Projects for Radio Broadcasting* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 75-97

⁹ Jennifer Spohrer, 'Threat or Beacon? Recasting International Broadcasting in Europe after World War II' in *Airy Curtains in the European Ether*, ed. Badenoch et al, 32-33

¹⁰ Julian Huxley, *UNESCO: Its Philosophy and Purpose* (Paris: UNESCO, 1946), 59-60

¹¹ Douglas Kennedy, 'The Director Writes: In the Raw', *English Dance and Song*, XVIII: 3 (1953-54), 77-78

¹² Arnheim, *Radio*, 30-32; Lance Sieveking, *The Stuff of Radio* (London: Cassell & Co., 1934), 15-26; Paddy Scannell, 'The Stuff of Radio': Developments in Radio Features and Documentaries Before the War' in *Documentary and the Mass Media*, ed. John Corner (London: Edward Arnold, 1986), 1-26

development of radio as a means of revealing nations: to one another and to themselves.¹³

Radio's worldliness was synonymous with cities; as was the kind of travel afforded by broadcasting—even built onto radio sets themselves, with European cities just turns of the dial away from each other.¹⁴ Such urbanity marked radio out as a product and representation of modernity, which, for some, amounted to the emancipation of sound from place; while for others it became part of modernity's broader crisis of experience, with its attendant fears of distraction and alienation, social disintegration and a loss of listening skills.¹⁵ In any case, the cultural forces articulated through radio – modernity, urbanity, internationalism – were perceived particularly keenly as a threat by those concerned with the presentation of national traditions as coherent and bounded.

Scheming the Nation

Constructing a bounded and culturally coherent nation requires a great deal of work. Specialist folklore institutions obviously believed that traditional musics were a good place to start, dreamt as the property and the language of the nation, aged and ageless.¹⁶ And those involved in the Scheme had no problem taking up these ideas, specifically adopting Cecil Sharp's notion of an ideal folk society – stable, rural, untouched – as its blueprint. This section traces the development of the Scheme within and across institutions, nationally and internationally: considering how it was shaped to fit the needs of broadcasting, while borrowing ideas and people from elsewhere.

Launched in 1952, the BBC Scheme employed two recordists – Peter Kennedy and Seamus Ennis – while others were contracted on an ad hoc basis. All reported and sent recordings to sound archivist Marie Slocombe in London, who in turn answered to the Head of Central Programme Operations

¹³ Walter Benjamin, 'Reflections on Radio' in *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008[1931]), 391

¹⁴ Fickers, 'Visibly Audible', 413, 432

¹⁵ Birdsall, *Nazi Soundscapes*, 17, 21-22

¹⁶ Philip Bohlman, *Music, Nationalism, and the Making of the New Europe* (London: Routledge, 2011), xxiv

and project administrator, Brian George. The Scheme was at once a project of preservation and dissemination, the BBC as collector and loudspeaker. Yet despite being nominally a BBC project, the Scheme sat at the intersection of the BBC and two other institutions.

We've met them already. First was the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS), the self-appointed custodians of English musical traditions, who seconded Peter Kennedy to the BBC for his post as Scheme fieldworker. Second was the International Folk Music Council (IFMC), administered by Secretary Maud Karpeles, previously Sharp's co-fieldworker and his ongoing champion. For both of these organisations, radio was heard as a great threat—considered the most damaging force to notions of folk purity. But the IFMC in particular attempted to work with broadcasters: on the one hand to make use of recording equipment largely unavailable elsewhere; and on the other hand to stake out a place for folk musics in national broadcasting and international exchange.

These three institutions converged at the IFMC conference of 1952, held in London at Cecil Sharp House. Delegates were also in attendance representing governments (Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Burma, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Mexico, Pakistan, Sweden, Turkey, Yugoslavia) and other broadcasters (Australian Broadcasting Commission, Bayerischer Rundfunk, Belgisch National Instituut voor Radio-Omroep, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Central African Broadcasting Station, Near East Arab Broadcasting Association, Norsk Rikskringkasting, Radio Eireann, Radio Nederland Wereldomroep, Süddeutscher Rundfunk). A clutch of ethnomusicologists and folklorists – Matts Arnberg, Arnold Bake, Arthur Morris Jones, Jaap Kunst, A.L. Lloyd, Claudie Marcel-Dubois, Giorgio Nataletti, Fernando Ortiz, Charles Seeger – were also present (while others, such as Isabel Aretz and Klaus Wachsmann, submitted communications in their absence); as were delegates from UNESCO, HMV, the Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires in Paris, and the National Museum of Canada.

All were concerned with the preservation and circulation of traditional musics as a means of shoring up national identities in sound. Radio was on the conference agenda, signalling its significance, as delegates sought to harness the capacities of the medium. Many IFMC members were wary of

broadcasting: Ethel Bassin said of the Highlands and islands of Scotland that 'nowadays remoteness has been conquered by faster transport, handicraft is giving way to electricity and the long quiet evenings have been invaded by radio'; Ole Mørk Sandvik of Norway commented that 'the radio has become a formidable rival to traditional song. Every minute of the day the children can hear music from remote places, and in the long run this may destroy the sense of the national musical mother-tongue'.¹⁷ Radio's ability to collapse distance was explicitly construed in damaging terms. And its modernity was connected to broader social conditions; IFMC member A.G. Malavasi of Rome shared with the conference: 'a return to the traditional ways of recreation is an antidote to these empty and passive forms of amusement and a release from the processes of mechanisation which tend to reduce more and more man's creative capacities'.¹⁸

Others were more optimistic. The 1952 conference featured reports from broadcasters across Europe and beyond, and the Council founded a Radio Commission: to pool information on extant recordings held in broadcasting archives, to propose recording projects to broadcasters, to produce programmes for distribution, and to facilitate the exchange of recordings and programmes of folk music between the broadcasting corporations of the world.¹⁹ Marie Slocombe gave the first report, in which she welcomed the conference as an opportunity to discuss problems in the field and learn from colleagues overseas. She continued: 'The BBC does in fact concern itself with the dissemination of folk music in a number of different ways and at several different levels. And it is right that it should even feel a special responsibility in this, since we wield a medium which by its nature is one of the most potent to destroy some of the conditions which have fostered folk music in the past'.²⁰

Her report was followed by similar presentations by other broadcasting representatives: Paul Collaer of the Belgian National Broadcasting Service spoke of 'journeys of discovery' and agreements with explorers to bring back sound recordings from their travels; Andreas Reischek, representing the four

¹⁷ International Folk Music Council, 'General Report', *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, 5 (1953), 12

¹⁸ IFMC, 'General Report', 15

¹⁹ IFMC, 'General Report', 25

²⁰ IFMC, 'General Report', 25

Austrian broadcasting networks, recounted a series broadcast from a concert hall between 1934-37 entitled 'We Are Learning Folk Songs'; Georg Kannewischer of Bayerischer Rundfunk in Munich reported his network's endeavours to 'make Bavarian listeners acquainted with the songs of all nations'; while Hermann Dahmen of Süddeutscher Rundfunk in Stuttgart regarded it as the 'duty of radio organisations to preserve folk music by means of recordings, to appeal to listeners for information, to help collectors and to popularise authentic folk music by means of broadcasts'.²¹

Others were more explicitly concerned with nation building and inclusion (and exclusion): Richard Lambert of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation posited broadcasting as a means of 'developing a sense of national unity amongst the many European races which composed the population of Canada'. While some concerned themselves with the idea of passivity brought about by radio listening: Egon Kraus, representing the German UNESCO commission, reported a broadcast in Cologne called 'Open Singing', in which listeners were encouraged to sing along with their radios.²²

Nations could be sounded and exchanged. There was a general consensus that broadcasting and music scholarship were compatible and could be mutually beneficial. This had been the case earlier, for instance in the work of Robert Lachmann for the Palestine Broadcasting Service in the mid-1930s, as discussed by Ruth Davis.²³ And there was now an assumption that 'radio could play a positive role in the creation of suitable conditions for the survival and development of folk music in the changing modern world and folklorists must help it in this great task'.²⁴ Slocombe was appointed as Secretary of the Radio Commission.

A mood of postwar mutualism prevailed, but there was also an effort to define the terms of engagement on the part of British participants. The 1952

²¹ IFMC, 'General Report', 26-28

²² IFMC, 'General Report', 28

²³ Ruth Davis, 'Robert Lachmann's *Oriental Music*: A Broadcasting Initiative in 1930s Palestine' in *The Mediterranean in Music: Critical Perspectives, Common Concerns, Cultural Differences*, ed. Cooper and Dawe (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 79-83. Davis writes that 'radio could play a vital role in fostering human, as well as musical understanding'

²⁴ H.J. Dahmen et al, 'Report of the Radio Commission', *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, 8 (1956), 53

conference also featured a discussion of defining folk music, leading inevitably to a muddle of opinions on tradition and transmission. A fissure emerged between those representing European nations and those from South America, Asia and Africa. The former held onto Herderian ideals: folk music as coming 'from the people themselves, anonymously, from the poetic instinct dormant in the subconscious mind of a community rooted to the soil'. Renato Almeida of the Brazilian National Folklore Commission observed that definitions based on oral transmission did not apply to the Americas, where folk songs were 'what the people accept and sing', irrespective of source; U. Khin Zaw, Director of Burmese Broadcasting, further pointed out that in Burma classical as well folk music was subjected to oral transmission as there was no written music.²⁵

Eventually the task was abandoned with the grouchy conclusion that it was 'impossible at the present stage of knowledge to define folk music to the satisfaction of all scholars'. But a provisional declaration was made, asserting: 'folk music is music that has been submitted to the process of oral transmission. It is the product of evolution and is dependent on the circumstances of continuity, variation and selection'.²⁶ This was met by accusations of Western bias, and not accounting for spontaneous creation; but these central tenets – lifted straight from Sharp's conclusions on English folk song,²⁷ and glossing over all objections, non-European opinions, and power imbalances – would become the official IFMC definition of folk music, and were central to Scheme policy.²⁸

This history of fieldwork is marked by its historicism. The Scheme cleaved closely to earlier dominant models of musical folklore, breaking only with its past through the use of modern recording technologies. Field recordings became a scaffold onto which the nation could be affixed. In this model, sounds were to be exchanged internationally, but only after being filtered through notions of national purity, and indexed to the nation.

²⁵ IFMC, 'General Report', 9-11

²⁶ IFMC, 'General Report', 12

²⁷ Cecil Sharp, *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions* (Taunton: Barnicott and Pearce, 1907)

²⁸ IFMC, 'Resolutions: Definition of Folk Music', *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, 7 (1955), 23

Policy built upon echoes and atavisms was further informed by war and its aftermath, particularly a renewed fear of Americanisation. BBC culture had initially developed out of such fear in the 1920s, and this tension became recharged when, in 1943, an American Forces Network was established in Britain becoming the first break with the BBC's government-protected monopoly.²⁹ Christina Baade charts how the number of American troops stationed in Britain ballooned through 'invasion year' of May 1943 to May 1944, and how the implementation of a separate network posed a direct challenge to the BBC's self-perceived mission of unifying the nation. The Scheme was part of the response: a salvage project, the nation constructed through musics subjacent to the national, the bottom-up represented from the top-down, another ethnographic fiction.

The BBC ran the Scheme in accord with the logic of public service broadcasting. Monopoly privilege was coupled with certain duties, which – drawing on the work of Paddy Scannell – included: contributing to the democratisation of everyday life; providing mixed programming with universal availability; reinventing a sense of national community; offering access to previously restricted events; and opening up communication for marginal social groups.³⁰ Scannell, writing elsewhere with David Cardiff, highlights how monopoly public service broadcasting is also invested with a sense of national pride, and ultimately links culture with nationalism.³¹ The BBC did not simply reflect national culture, but produced it. And the Scheme, while not exactly the top priority for the postwar BBC, certainly accorded with these nation-building endeavours.

At the close of war, the BBC's international reputation was at a peak.³² It celebrated its 25th anniversary in 1947 with discourse that it was 'the leading

²⁹ Simon Frith, 'Pleasures of the Hearth – The Making of BBC Light Entertainment' in *Music for Pleasure: Essays on the Sociology of Pop* (Oxford: Polity, 1988), 24-25; Christina Baade, *Victory Through Harmony: The BBC and Popular Music in World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 176-80

³⁰ Paddy Scannell, 'Public Service Broadcasting and Modern Public Life', *Media, Culture, and Society*, 11: 2 (1989), 135-66

³¹ Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff, *A Social History of British Broadcasting, Volume One 1922-1939: Serving the Nation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 10

³² Siân Nicholas, *The Echo of War: How Front Propaganda and the Wartime BBC, 1939-45* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 1; Thomas Hajkowski,

broadcaster in the world'.³³ Postwar overseas broadcasting was focused on 'the projection of Britain' and the British way of life to other Europeans.³⁴ But nationalist discourse masked the messy institutional labour behind nation building, and how national culture itself was always contested, under construction and review.

Of particular concern was the need to fit four nations into one overarching national broadcasting system. The BBC also used the language of 'regions' to describe Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. BBC producers in London routinely got in trouble with their Scottish counterparts for referring to 'Britain' as 'England', and broadcast celebrations of 'England' were resented by the other British nations.³⁵ Scottish, Welsh, and Northern Irish producers were keen to assert distinctive national identities through broadcasting. All drew extensively on rural culture, tradition, and music, as well as industry and everyday urban life. And all, ironically, contributed to a composite 'British' national consciousness.³⁶

Even within England, regional stations took umbrage with the national culture produced centrally, which frequently presented 'deep' – southern – England as the essence of nationness. The North Region, in particular, produced a body of now-canonic urban and industrial documentaries, thanks to a school of writers and producers including A.E. Harding, D.G. Bridson, Olive Shapley, and John Coatman.³⁷ Postwar BBC restructuring responded with a push toward regional devolution and greater autonomy of programming. The

The BBC and National Identity in Britain, 1922-53 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 2

³³ Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Volume IV: Sound and Vision* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 163

³⁴ Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, 138-40

³⁵ Hajkowski, *The BBC and National Identity*, 155-56; Nicholas, *The Echo of War*, 231

³⁶ Hajkowski, *The BBC and National Identity*, 135-228

³⁷ Scannell, 'The Stuff of Radio'; Scannell and Cardiff, *A Social History of British Broadcasting*, 151-52; Peter Cox, *Set Into Song: Ewan MacColl, Charles Parker, Peggy Seeger, and the Radio Ballads* (Cambridge: Labatie Books, 2008), 62-71. Asa Briggs gives us John Coatman's radio ideology of 1949: 'broadcasting must be side by side with the people, must be animated by the pulse of their life, and feed itself directly from their thoughts and doings'; another North Region official recalled the early 1950s as a period in which 'one really knew something about the North of England'—in Briggs, 'Local and Regional in Northern Sound Broadcasting', *Northern History*, 10: 1 (1975), 181-83

1951 Beveridge Report on Broadcasting spoke of introducing 'federal harmony' to replace 'centralising unity in London'.³⁸

Yet resources remained greater in London than elsewhere, and centralised endeavours like the Scheme were still deemed necessary. Britishness, whichever way it is sliced, remained a fraught and freighted term. Its tensions were shot through the Scheme: between nations, regions, and 'national regions'; between a centralised recording venture and a push towards regional devolution; between internal worry of monolithic nationness and attempts to produce the nation at home and abroad.

There was also the concern that traditional cultures were imperilled. Slocombe wrote that 'we come all too late in the day with our recording machines ... in another ten years' time there may be nothing left to collect, even in areas which are still surprisingly rich today'.³⁹ Elsewhere she wrote of how 'much still remained to be recorded, even in these over-urbanised islands'.⁴⁰ And all this was written into a collectors' brief issued to Kennedy and Ennis. Stress was placed on finding and salvaging survivals, and a neat and breezy definition of folk music was offered: that 'which has passed by oral tradition through at least two or three generations, the original version usually being unknown or perhaps obscured by variants which have subsequently appeared'.⁴¹

The recordists were instructed to avoid 'material of doubtful authenticity (e.g. musical hall or popular songs, singers who have been subjected to outside influences, etc.)'.⁴² At the same time, the exigencies of broadcasting complicated the search; collectors were instructed to make recordings explicitly 'for the purposes of broadcasting', and were given detailed instruction on sonic suitability:

³⁸ Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, 383

³⁹ Marie Slocombe, 'Round Britain with a Recording Machine: The BBC as Collector', *English Dance and Song*, XVII: 1 (1952), 12-13

⁴⁰ Marie Slocombe, 'The BBC Folk Music Collection', *The Folklore and Folk Music Archivist*, 7: 1 (1964), 4

⁴¹ Brief from Head of Central Programme Operations, 16/5/1952. BBC WAC R46/658/1 – Rec Gen 'Folk Music' 1952-59

⁴² Brief from HCPOps, 16/5/1952

It must be born in mind that the main purpose of the scheme is to provide material which is acceptable for broadcast purposes from the technical and programme points of view. The main problems which will present themselves to the collector are: (1) is the material offered *authentic* from the folklore point of view? (2) Is the sound produced likely to be *acceptable for broadcasting*?

These two criteria should be considered together, and if the value under (1) is considered exceptionally high, a generous interpretation should be given to (2). It might therefore be of value to make a record of an old man with a little voice, if his song is of great folklore interest, even though it appears unlikely that the record itself will ever be broadcast in its entirety.⁴³

Far from being a monolithic force out to destroy folk musics, the resources of radio were being turned towards staking out broadcasting space for select musical traditions. But this rescue fieldwork was enveloped in the materialities of the medium; the needs of preservation and broadcast were not entirely compatible. The fragments of memory would become the fragments of montage. Radio aesthetics would be built into the recordings themselves, shot through with mediality, imagined audience, cultural values. All would become the stuff of radio. The old but not too old. For the purposes of broadcasting.

The Scheme, like the projects discussed already in this thesis, contained the logics of national phonography. It was believed that the fragments of pre-industrial pasts could be located in rural areas, representing a pure form of nationness. Recording technology could then be used to salvage these fragments, bringing them together under the sign of the nation. Radio was to be a national contact zone. But this recording project differs from its contemporaries through its medium. Making recordings for broadcasting shaped their production before and during fieldwork, and it is the BBC's fieldworkers we now follow.

⁴³ Brief from HCPOps, 16/5/1952

In the Field

The first act was to return to the fieldwork of the past. Karpeles, working temporarily for the Scheme, headed directly to the descendants of singers recorded by Sharp. What she found were the 'wrong' kinds of song: 'nearly always the "old" songs they produced were the popular songs of Victorian times and not folk songs'.⁴⁴ Kennedy was confronted with the same problem, bemoaning his fieldwork as 'not easy as everyone sang Child ballads and popular crooners' songs at once'.⁴⁵ Enacting Scheme policy fabricated a distinction between musics, performing what James Clifford calls 'artificial aesthetic purifications': recordists found singers' receptivity to certain musics annoying; they were collecting culture while expecting others not to.⁴⁶

Kennedy (Figure 4.1) wrote of how 'country singers seldom make any distinction between different types of song; in fact, the Music Hall ditties are generally considered the "old 'uns" (after all, you can hear "folk songs" on the wireless!)'.⁴⁷ Elsewhere Slocombe reported that direct publicity of the Scheme—'announcing a visit to a given area beforehand, appeals to performers to offer themselves, etc.'—was not rewarding on the grounds that it 'is likely to call forth the wrong kind of response, and lead to much waste of time'.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Maud Karpeles report to Marie Slocombe, 10/5/1952. BL PK Box 16 – BBC Reports

⁴⁵ Peter Kennedy reports to Marie Slocombe, June-July 1954 and June-July 1955. BL PK Box 16 – BBC Reports

⁴⁶ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 4, 232

⁴⁷ Peter Kennedy, 'Collector's Corner, Part 2', *English Dance and Song*, XXI: 1 (Sept/Oct 1956), 27-28

⁴⁸ Marie Slocombe, 'Review of Scheme from April to December', 21 November 1952. BBC WAC R46/658/1 – Rec Gen 'Folk Music' 1952-59

FOLK-SONG



PETER KENNEDY cross-questions for the B.B.C.
Edgar Button, traditional singer, at "The Eel's Foot"

Figure 4.1: Peter Kennedy on fieldwork in Eastbridge, Suffolk, 1952. From Peter Kennedy promotional material, c. mid-1960s. Ephemera Scrapbook, VWML

Fieldwork highlighted the contradictions of using broadcast technologies to construct a representation of a culture free from 'outside influence'. Certainly the Scheme made use of existing traffic in locating performers, often relying on singers writing to the BBC after hearing a broadcast to offer a 'more antique or correct' version of a song.⁴⁹ Folk musics were coterminous with modern telecommunications. BBC producers were convinced that recording people in their homes would give a more 'authentic performance', avoiding

⁴⁹ S.M. Wheatley report to Marie Slocombe, 22/10/1952. BBC WAC R46/658/1 – Rec Gen 'Folk Music' 1952-59

having to 'transport the singer from his natural environment'.⁵⁰ But such talk paints rural populations as geographically and temporally static—bound to place and stuck in time. The institution heard itself as national unifier, believing that urban and rural populations could only be connected through the inscription and transmission of culture; that is, could only be connected by the BBC.

Moreover, such eager focus on there being right and wrong kinds of performers and of musics, coupled with the Scheme's fieldwork methods of quick-fire collecting rather than anything particularly participatory or experiential, led to cavalier practices and shoddy ethics. Kennedy's field reports are full of such breaches: when recording farmers in Northumberland and the Scottish Borders in the summer of 1954, he would make recordings after the day's labour, starting at midnight when 'they were extremely tired physically', and finishing sometimes as late as five in the morning; after a singer in Herefordshire told Kennedy that she didn't know any songs, he began reciting a carol, at which point 'she said the words with me by mistake and gave herself away. I said I would be back at five tomorrow evening to record her'; in Devon he called on a singer only to find he 'nearly died a few months before' and was recovering from a stroke, only to continue undeterred 'to record his songs by going very steadily'.⁵¹

Recordists were provided with a battery-operated machine—the inherent politics of this technology compatible with the Scheme's anti-urbanity.⁵² Other technologies and techniques were quickly adopted. A loudspeaker was used, affording playback to performers who could subsequently offer 'improved rendering on repeats'; a microphone stand was requested, as Kennedy observed that 'there is nothing so disconcerting as having to hold a mike up to a person's face when they are singing'; and there was discussion of using power extensions to keep recording machines in vehicles parked outside, so

⁵⁰ Timothy Eckersley memo to Marie Slocombe, 12/2/1954. BBC WAC R46/658/1 – Rec Gen 'Folk Music' 1952-59

⁵¹ Peter Kennedy reports to Marie Slocombe, June-July 1954, October-November 1952 and May 1952. BL PK Box 16 – BBC Reports

⁵² On the inherent politics of technologies, see Langdon Winner, 'Do Artefacts Have Politics?' in *The Social Shaping of Technology*, ed. MacKenzie and Wajcman (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 1999[1980]), 28-40

as to perform a door-to-door recording operation: 'we can do our jobs so easily without any disturbance to anyone and be on to the next house in no time'.⁵³

Much effort was expended, then, on figuring out best methods and equipment. Machines, microphones, personnel, and techniques were shared across BBC departments recording the various fields of wildlife sound, urban documentary, and folk music. Kennedy worked with wildlife recordist Ludwig Koch, and applied techniques learnt in that field to his work with the Scheme.⁵⁴ And recording techniques were shared internationally: BBC technicians toured broadcasting studios and microphone factories in Germany and Austria at the end of 1955 to learn of developments they could apply in recording and production.

Field recording was a studio art, as concerned with controlling and ordering sound as strategies developed in specialist recording spaces. But just as technologies were employed to order the nation, they imposed their own will on the results of the Scheme. The limitations of recording technology informed what the recordists could record, what was sounded and what remained silent, which bits of the nation were shipped to London for preservation and broadcast. Kennedy reported frequent machine trouble, which affected and sometimes scuppered recording trips: '23rd June, recording Ned Pearson again. I have been waiting nearly six years to get him really well recorded and now finally I was flawed by machine breakdown at the crucial moment'.

Further processes of selection and rejection awaited; there was Slocombe in London, listening. Exactly what was deemed suitable 'for the purposes of broadcasting' becomes clearer: 'I'm afraid I have been rather ruthless with this one (partly because of recording quality)'; 'I'm afraid I don't think this player is good enough to be broadcast'; 'Fred Pidgeon you will no doubt weep about, but I don't think his playing is good enough, as the material is not really very

⁵³ S.M. Wheatley report to Marie Slocombe, 22/10/1952; Peter Kennedy report to Marie Slocombe, 4/2/1954; Peter Kennedy letter to Marie Slocombe, 2/8/1953. BBC WAC R46/658/1 – Rec Gen 'Folk Music' 1952-59

⁵⁴ David Attenborough and the Natural History of Folk', BBC Radio 2, broadcast 12 February 2014. Information at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/proginfo/2014/06/r2-david-attenborough-wednesday.html>

rare or of exceptional interest'; 'Mrs Vincent is so very out of tune—I'm so sorry'.⁵⁵ Slocombe's job as gatekeeper involved sifting through recordings to find those that ticked boxes of sonic intelligibility, musical proficiency and more. Vetoes were further applied elsewhere, with senior producers rejecting songs deemed potentially offensive to listeners, cleaning up tradition to accord with the BBC's take on national character.⁵⁶

Recordists were also attuned to the needs of the medium. They carried the Scheme ethos, 'for the purposes of broadcasting', around with them, resounding in their ears and into their microphones. A particular form of radio fieldwork emerges. Kennedy wrote of his experimentation while recording dancing to give a 'changing sound picture', his practice aligning with the theory of radio experimentalists Sieveking and Arnheim. He emphasised keynote sounds – described by Karin Bijsterveld, drawing on R. Murray Schafer, as 'sounds that make up the background sound of a sonic environment'⁵⁷ – in his reports, writing variously of making recordings in farmyards 'with local sound effects', and coaxing singers to make recordings while fishing 'in order to record shanties on board with boat effects'. Sonic context was as important as recorded text. He even wrote to Hamish Henderson, who was helping with the Scheme from Scotland, advising him not to send further recordings of singers, on the grounds that the Scheme's focus was to 'get a wide variety of material, not just in collecting actual songs. You see it is programme material that is required in a general way, sound effects etc.'. ⁵⁸

Slocombe, reviewing the Scheme's first year, posited fieldwork as a series of 'expeditions' undertaken to make 'a rapid initial survey of the field in order to form some idea of the relative survival of useful material in various parts of the

⁵⁵ Marie Slocombe memos to Peter Kennedy, 10/2/1956 and 7/3/1956. PK BL Box 17 – BBC Sound/R.P. Library

⁵⁶ Timothy Eckersley memo to Marie Slocombe, 7/7/1955. BBC WAC R46/658/1 – Rec Gen 'Folk Music' 1952-59

⁵⁷ Karin Bijsterveld, 'Introduction' in *Soundscapes of the Urban Past: Staged Sound as Mediated Cultural Heritage*, ed. Bijsterveld (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013), 15

⁵⁸ Peter Kennedy reports to Marie Slocombe, 7/6/1952, 25/5/1952, June–July 1954. BL PK Box 16 – BBC Reports; Peter Kennedy letter to Hamish Henderson, 17/10/1955. PK BL Box 11 – Hamish Henderson

country'.⁵⁹ Of this useful material, she acknowledged that 'the items recorded have not always been folk music in the purest sense of the term ... any material of strong local flavour, or of potential use as incidental background, is thought to be of value, whether acceptable as folk music in the strictest sense or not'.⁶⁰ Fieldwork as expeditions, songs as things containing use value, concern with keynote sounds and 'local flavour', and prioritising broadcast needs over self-imposed definitions of tradition show the Scheme's purifications were difficult to implement in practice. And these medialities were woven into broader radio aesthetics as field recordings reached the public ear.

On the Air

The Controller of the Light Programme, Kenneth Adam, wrote in spring 1953 to Brian George requesting a program 'embodying the results of your folksong researches'. He wanted a show 'on popular lines ... to supply the results of your fieldwork in a lively, interesting and varied way', and suggested a couple of titles: 'Music of Yours', 'This is Your Music'.⁶¹ The program *As I Roved Out* – the title eventually used in place of Adam's suggestions – was launched as a companion to the Scheme in September 1953. The *Radio Times* commented that 'listeners will be able to hear the results of a special investigation undertaken by the BBC—an investigation to discover the truth about the survival of living folk music in Britain', and that listeners were 'invited to share the adventures and discoveries of these BBC "collectors"'.⁶²

BBC broadcasting had been restructured into three domestic programs at the end of the war. The Home Service offered mixed programming and hosted regional broadcasting; the Third Programme was directed at a 'highly intelligent minority audience'; and, succeeding the populist wartime Forces Programme, the Light Programme was launched to broadcast 'popular, but

⁵⁹ Marie Slocombe, 'Review of Scheme from April to December', 21/11/1952. BBC WAC R46/658/1 – Rec Gen 'Folk Music' 1952-59

⁶⁰ Slocombe, 'Review of Scheme', 21/11/1952. BBC WAC R46/658/1 – Rec Gen 'Folk Music' 1952-59

⁶¹ Kenneth Adam memo to Brian George, 13/3/1953. BBC WAC R46/26/1 – Rec Gen 'As I Roved Out' File 1A: 1953-1954

⁶² *Radio Times*, 'Both Sides of the Microphone: Folk Songs and Singers', 25/9/1953, 7

not rubbishy' material.⁶³ The latter station quickly garnered a predominantly working-class audience, although the BBC claimed it was 'designed to appeal not so much to a certain class of listener, but to all listeners when they are in certain moods'.⁶⁴ It broadcast a modified form of light entertainment, developed by the BBC in the interwar period, and earmarked by Simon Frith as a distinctly British middlebrow culture.⁶⁵ The aim with the three programs was to guide listeners 'up the cultural scale', from Light to Home to Third.⁶⁶ All three stations made claims on the British character, and, despite its lightness, the Light Programme continued the BBC tradition of infusing entertainment with edification.

Airing on Sunday mornings, *As I Roved Out* presented field recordings to the listening public in fragments, rarely over a minute in length, alongside chamber orchestra arrangements and studio performances of the same melodies. Spike Hughes – popular entertainer, jazz composer, and opera critic – compèred most of the programmes, while recordists gave accounts of fieldtrips from the studio. Program content was contested, as producer Harold Rogers sought to square the results of fieldwork with Light Programme populism.⁶⁷

The show's theme tune was consistent with demands for 'lively, interesting and varied' content: a verse of a field recording of Sarah Makem singing 'As I Roved Out' – recorded by Kennedy at Makem's home in County Armagh, Northern Ireland, in July 1952 – segued into an arrangement of the same melody for violin, cello, guitar, accordion and flute. The programme's house band of BBC-contracted session musicians was led by tango band leader Eugene Pini, and his brother, Anthony, principal cellist in the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. Studio cosmopolitanism was presented as archetypically national music, as programmes focused on the parts of Britain supposedly free from outside interference. The majority of the first season's twenty-five shows were given to counties of rural southern England, with a

⁶³ Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, 52, 55; Nicholas, *The Echo of War*, 50-53

⁶⁴ Nicholas, *The Echo of War*, 275; Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, 83

⁶⁵ Frith, 'Pleasures of the Hearth', 28;

⁶⁶ Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, 76

⁶⁷ E. David Gregory, 'Roving Out: Peter Kennedy and the BBC Folk Music and Dialect Recording Scheme, 1952-57' in *Folk Song: Tradition, Revival, and Re-Creation*, ed. Russell and Atkinson (Aberdeen: The Elphinstone Institute, 2004), 223

handful focused on music from northern Scotland, Wales and Ireland. The largely (but also largely not) industrial north of England remained silent, as did Scotland's central belt (Figure 4.2).

Date of broadcast	Regions represented
27/9/1953	Buckinghamshire and County Armagh
4/10/1953	West Country
11/10/1953	Skye and County Louth
18/10/1953	County Cork and Norfolk
25/10/1953	Pembrokeshire
1/11/1953	Scotland
No show on 8/11/1953 (remembrance)	
15/11/1953	Devon and Connemara
22/11/1953	Belfast and Kirkcudbrightshire
29/11/1953	Donegal and Suffolk
6/12/1953	Sussex and Pembrokeshire
13/12/1953	Buckinghamshire and Connemara
20/12/1953	Herefordshire and Gloucestershire
27/12/1953	A 'Christmas get-together'
03/1/1954	Cornwall, Somerset, Gloucestershire and the Gower Peninsula
10/1/1954	Wales and Oxfordshire
17/1/1954	Cotswolds and Outer Hebrides
24/1/1954	Lincolnshire and South-West Donegal
31/1/1954	Folksongs of the British Isles
7/2/1954	Norfolk and North East Scotland
14/2/1954	County Armagh
21/2/1954	Suffolk
28/2/1954	Children's edition – Sidbury, Devon and Kentish Town
7/3/1954	Shetland Islands and Pembrokeshire
14/3/1954	Ireland
21/3/1954	Suffolk
28/3/1954	Folk songs from the British Isles

Figure 4.2: List of Broadcasts for *As I Roved Out*, Series One, 1953-54

Some programmes were produced away from London. A half-hour broadcast in a later series of *As I Roved Out*, broadcast on 10 April 1955, provides an illustration of how programmes were assembled from various sources. The geographical focus of this broadcast was Scotland, and it included five members of the BBC Scottish Orchestra – playing oboe, clarinet, horn, bassoon and viola – to act as a 'light music combination', recording arrangements by Francis Collinson at the BBC's Glasgow studios. The musicians were paid £3 each, and the recordings were made on the basis that they were 'short records of special character required for frequent repetition'.⁶⁸ The programme began with Kennedy recordings of Togo Crawford, a shepherd from Kirkcudbrightshire, singing 'The Jolly Band of Shearers' (01:20) and 'The Gates of Drum' (01:40); followed by 'The Shearers' played on oboe (00:20), and a forty-second excerpt of a recording from the School of Scottish Studies of Miss Douglas Gordon singing 'The Laird of Drum'.

This was followed by four minutes of Collinson's arrangements of these same songs, then forty-five seconds of Kate Laing singing 'The Braes of Lochiel', taken from another School of Scottish Studies recording. BBC singer Alan MacDonald then performed 'The Braes of Locheil' (00:55), 'It Is I'm Heavily Depressed' (00:55), and 'As I'm Sitting Among the White Stones' (00:55). Then recordings of Flora MacNeil singing 'Mo Ghaol A' Chruinneag' (01.35) and 'Gura Muladach Sgìth Mi' (01.35); and Collinson arrangements of the songs sung earlier by MacDonald. Collinson and Seamus Ennis narrated the programme—a total of eleven minutes of talk interspersed among the recordings.⁶⁹

In bridging fieldwork and light entertainment, these programmes were not simply presenting music, but the activity and experience of finding and recording music. They functioned as audio travelogues through selected regions of Britain; field recordings served as landmarks on the route. The

⁶⁸ Harold Rogers memo to Orchestral Secretary, BBC Scottish Orchestra, Glasgow, 3/12/1954; Orchestral Secretary memo to Rogers, 23/11/1954. BBC WAC R46/26/1 – Rec Gen 'As I Roved Out' File 1A: 1953-1954

⁶⁹ BBC WAC R46/26/1 – Rec Gen 'As I Roved Out' File 1A: 1953-1954

notion of the wandering microphone had developed earlier, in the late 1920s, unifying the diverse sounds of a city or locale, region or nation through montage.⁷⁰ With the Scheme and its broadcast extensions, the 'roving out' was that of the microphone, dependent upon new technologies to situate sounds as cultural heritage, to portray remoteness by dint of connectedness and access.

The presentation of field recordings in fragments, and the interweaving of orchestral arrangements, drew complaints from the recordists. In February 1954, Kennedy argued to the programme's producer, Harold Rogers, that 'we have a certain responsibility, both to the public and to the people who make the field recordings, to present "folk music as it is still sung and played in the British Isles". We should therefore pass on this music as far as possible in the same manner as it has come about'. In August that year he went further, threatening to withdraw from the programme's second series if changes were not made, demanding more music 'in the raw' and less 'artificial sugar coating'.⁷¹ Rogers forwarded the memos up the BBC chain of command, adding his own view on the matter: 'I must say, personally, I feel for Light Programme the last series of "As I Roved Out" were right in style and treatment'.⁷²

Frith argues that the BBC Sunday reflected a 'set of assumptions about the place of the weekend in the organisation of family life'.⁷³ Henri Lefebvre makes a similar point, sketching how the media produce the everyday through use of rhythm. These media rhythms change according to intention and the hour: 'soft and tender for the return from work, times of relaxation, the evening and Sunday'.⁷⁴ The programme's theme tune – a field recording melted into a chamber orchestra – encapsulates the process of the BBC shooting squarely for the middlebrow. Fieldwork is transposed into the key of leisure, sonically

⁷⁰ Carolyn Birdsall, 'Sonic Artefacts: Reality Codes of Urbanity in Early German Radio Documentary' in *Soundscapes of the Urban Past*, ed. Bijsterveld, 139-41

⁷¹ Peter Kennedy memos to Harold Rogers, 17/02/1954 and 11/08/1954. BBC WAC R46/26/1 – Rec Gen 'As I Roved Out' File 1A: 1953-1954

⁷² Harold Rogers memo to A.R. Phillips, 13/08/1954. BBC WAC R46/26/1 – Rec Gen 'As I Roved Out' File 1A: 1953-1954

⁷³ Frith, 'Pleasures of the Hearth', 34, 41

⁷⁴ Henri Lefebvre, 'The Media Day' in *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, trans. Stuart Elden (London: Bloomsbury, 2013[1992]), 57

suitable for the BBC Sunday. Field recordings had to be fragmented to be digestible, to lock into the values associated with domestic listening, to accord with what the nation should sound like.

Those recorded weren't happy, either; Alec Bloomfield of Benhall in Suffolk told Kennedy that he 'liked the traditional dance music, was bored by the talk and infuriated by the cutting of the traditional songs, and substitution of art music'.⁷⁵ The BBC's audience research gave mixed reviews: some were 'delighted' and thought the programme to be 'a most agreeable mixture of information, erudition, music, entertainment and humour'; others were 'interested, but less fervent. They found parts of the programme very pleasant indeed, but others not so worthwhile'; others 'could see no point in "all this searching after old stuff"', and 'thought the programme a waste of time'.⁷⁶ Later, audience research claimed that listeners were 'delighted to learn so much that was new about "different and unknown parts of the country" by such an entertaining device, and in a friendly and happy atmosphere'.⁷⁷ A balancing act was being performed in the studio—between education and entertainment, between distance and familiarity. In other words, *As I Roved Out* was a perfectly ordinary example of BBC light entertainment.

As I Roved Out slotted into broader folk music programming, soon becoming one of the BBC's main national vehicles for broadcasting traditional musics. It supplanted *Country Magazine* (1942-54), a programme on rural life and heritage that featured one folksong per episode arranged by musicologist and collector Francis Collinson, who also worked for the School of Scottish Studies. Regional stations also produced many programmes including traditional musics, but few were broadcast across all of Britain, and none claimed to represent the nation in the same way. Peggy Duesenberry details traditional music broadcasting in Scotland before, during, and after World War II, highlighting how Scottish broadcasting shaped musical performance and

⁷⁵ Peter Kennedy report to Marie Slocombe, October 1953. BL PK Box 16 – BBC Reports

⁷⁶ BBC Audience Research Report for 'As I Roved Out', 22/04/1955. BBC WAC R46/26/2 – Rec Gen 'As I Roved Out' File 1B: 1955

⁷⁷ Harold Rogers memo to Brian George, 31/08/1955. BBC WAC R46/26/2 – Rec Gen 'As I Roved Out' File 1B: 1955

reception, not least by auditioning musicians and ensembles to test suitability for broadcast. This policy meant that 'performers deemed too "rough" for the sensibilities of BBC producers had no chance to be heard'.⁷⁸ Slocombe, too, remarked that folk music appeared most often in choral or orchestral arrangement.⁷⁹ The idea of folk music sat awkwardly in BBC musical hierarchies of classical and light, serious and popular.

Field recordings brought their own problems. For Slocombe, the Scheme differed from earlier BBC recording work as it had greater resources, and was a systematic nationwide endeavour.⁸⁰ Yet she relayed to the IFMC how the presentation of folk music 'in the raw' and in 'arranged form' was subject to much internal disagreement within the BBC: 'we are still arguing about it'.⁸¹ Scheme recordings nevertheless also appeared in programs with such suggestive titles as: *Music of the People*, *In Search of Music*, *Folk Song Forum*, *Primitive Music*, *Folk Music of the British Isles*, and *Postmark U.K.*⁸² They were a source material – an act of national phonography – translating scattered voices into national sound, constructing tradition as a tidy genre.

In many ways, then, the Scheme was not primarily about any particular programme. Slocombe also described to the IFMC how BBC recordists were 'working without being bound by programme schedules'.⁸³ Instead, it was a nation building exercise: about contributing to history, and constructing a big sonic stock of 'Britain' to be archived and exchanged, at a moment when national identity was somewhat up for grabs. So while the Scheme and its broadcast extensions were by no means central to general postwar BBC activities, it developed in lockstep with efforts to delimit the nation, to develop

⁷⁸ Peggy Duesenberry, 'Fiddle Tunes on Air: A Study of Gatekeeping and Traditional Music at the BBC in Scotland', PhD thesis, University of California, Berkeley (2000), 100

⁷⁹ Marie Slocombe, 'Radio Report', *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, 5 (1953), 25-26

⁸⁰ Marie Slocombe, 'British Broadcasting Corporation, London', *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, 7 (1955), 60

⁸¹ Slocombe, 'BBC, London', 60. These debates weren't limited to Britain or to the IFMC, but were playing out across Europe and elsewhere. The presentation of folk music in orchestral form was common practice for the China Record Corporation, and, slightly later, for Melodiya in the Soviet Union; both companies were state owned, and produced their own versions of national music

⁸² Slocombe, 'Review of Scheme from April to December 1952', and 'Stock Recording: Folk Music, 1956'. BBC WAC R46/658/1 – Rec Gen 'Folk Music' 1952-59

⁸³ IFMC, 'General Report', 26

programming that was 'firmly British in character'. It was one of many ways the BBC produced the nation, sitting alongside Third Programme refinement, careful appropriations of other cultures, and singularity through regionalism.

The effort to archive a sonic 'Britain' did not preclude the archiving and broadcasting of other nations. It was not an act of sonic isolationism, or a block on sounds from other nations within BBC output. Folk music programming included broadcasts of material from the American folk revival, mostly presented by Alan Lomax, who also produced series on Italian and Spanish musics, based on his own fieldwork while in Europe. But it was a process of national purification, a clear demarcation of 'British' from 'foreign', so that the nation became a coherent entity to be projected at home and promoted overseas. This model of securing the aural border was territorial. It joined a history of audio decontamination in Britain, and – consistent with the logics of national phonography – whittled 'national music' down to an essentialised traditional core, readying it for transnational communication. Representational space was again thus severely limited, and this production of nation involved a deliberate avoidance of three intertwined phenomena that challenged the binary of the national and international in postwar Britain: migration, displacement, and multiculturalism.

Karathanasopoulou and Crisell make the point that radio has never been just an observer, distributor, and preserver. In recording culture, 'the media are also recording themselves'.⁸⁴ An earlier point can be inverted: just as traditional musics were part of modern telecommunications, those same telecommunications were part of traditional musics. Moreover, the sounds archived and broadcast through the Scheme were the *product of* the medium. So when Jonathan Sterne writes that sounds 'are not plucked from the world for deposit and transmission' but 'come to exist in the first place in order to be reproduced through the network', this holds true for the Scheme.⁸⁵ Those recorded were singing for the medium—singing to the network.

⁸⁴ Evi Karathanasopoulou and Andrew Crisell, 'Radio Documentary and the Formation of Urban Aesthetics' in *Soundscapes of the Urban Past*, ed. Bijsterveld, 173

⁸⁵ Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 226

Scheme recordings were created and broadcast through a mess of policy makers, producers, archivists, recordists, musicians, imagined and empirical audiences; also recording machines, car batteries, transmitters and receivers, radio sets, historical ideas and their material extensions, and a host of institutional practices and other everyday technologies. The Scheme was an orchestration, an event, collapsing temporalities and employing technologies to organise a national aural public sphere. Radio fieldwork and broadcast, collecting and collectivity, are part of the same creative practice. Scheme recordings are the BBC recording the nation in its own (sound) image. They are the BBC recording itself.

Unifying the Radiauds

Radio listening has a distinct history. Even the language used to describe audience members has been contested. Laura Tunbridge charts how the word *listener* was placed in inverted commas in early issues of the *Radio Times*, and was jostling with other terms, notably 'listener-in', for prominence. Others wanted to be more specific: a 1923 letter from an amateur Wireless Society expressed a preference for the term 'radiaud', which would mark the difference between 'the man who is listening to the street corner orator and a member of the vast unseen audience'.⁸⁶

Logically enough, a number of writers have applied Benedict Anderson's concept of *Imagined Communities* to radio, demonstrating how 'deep, horizontal comradeship' within nations is conceived and performed through broadcast sound.⁸⁷ Yet admission to such communities can be conditional.

⁸⁶ Laura Tunbridge, 'Singing Translations: The Politics of Listening Between the Wars', *Representations*, 123: 1 (2013), 72

⁸⁷ For Anderson, this comradeship is achieved despite inequalities within nations, or the fact that most people within these 'communities' will never encounter, let alone know, each other. Technology is key. The reading of the daily newspaper, a development of what Anderson terms 'print-capitalism', is depicted as a kind of mass ceremony, in which the individual reader observes others reading exact replicas of their paper and is reassured that the imagined world of the nation is rooted in everyday life. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991), 7, 36. Hajkowski writes of a community of 'British listeners', making the sensible point that 'any social organisation beyond the pre-industrial village is in some sense "imaginary"'. Hajkowski, *The BBC and National Identity*, 6, 114. While Carolyn Birdsall conceives of an 'imagined *listening* community', honing in on Anderson's idea of *unisonance* – a form of collectivity engendered by

Frith comments that membership of the BBC's listening public was contingent on a set of radio manners, which made it possible for people and types of listening to be excluded.⁸⁸ This was even more the case with the production side of broadcasting. The BBC enacted Benjamin's 'spirit of radio' to a degree, but this remained an act of what Andrew Jones terms 'political ventriloquism': recordists and producers speak for – and thus silence – the objects of their sonic representation.⁸⁹

We are led back to voice. Michele Hilmes, also drawing on Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, posits radio as 'a machine for the circulation of narratives and representations that rehearse and justify the structures of order underlying national identity'.⁹⁰ But she argues against the idea that radio speaks univocally. Questions of social order dictate who speaks and who does not, who is addressed and not addressed, what is said and not said (or sung). At issue is who *gets into* the nation and who does not.⁹¹ Constructing the nation through radio means silencing, just as the nation itself is a silencer.

What was the voice of the nation construed by the Scheme? Scheme logic, its roots in survivals theory, and a hostility toward industrialisation served to systematically exclude music from urban centres; many demographics and large parts of Britain fall out of the nation entirely. State-sponsored radio nationalism also works to erase the voices of the nation's internal others.⁹² Scheme workers were securing the aural border at precisely the moment when the effects of empire on the imperial centre were undergoing significant change.

mass singing (of, say, national anthems), through which songs come to embody the nation – and expanding it to encompass radio listening: 'even if listeners do not actively join in the singing, they can share in the simultaneous moment of imagining oneself hearing the same sounds as other listeners'. Birdsall, *Nazi Soundscapes*, 104-06

⁸⁸ 'To become a BBC listener was to join a club (children could do so literally) which clearly excluded people with bad radio manners—the "tap" listeners, the passive consumers'—Frith, 'Pleasures of the Hearth', 42

⁸⁹ Andrew Jones, *Yellow Music: Media Culture and Colonial Modernity in the Chinese Jazz Age* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 109, 123-26

⁹⁰ Michele Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting 1922 to 1952* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 12-13

⁹¹ Bohlman, *Music, Nationalism, and the Making of the New Europe*, 6

⁹² Bohlman, *Music, Nationalism, and the Making of the New Europe*, 12

All of this prompts us to ask again what 'for the purposes of broadcasting' actually means. It has a strong sonic dimension, and a clear sense of the musically appropriate; but is it also covering the appropriateness of class, religion, politics, ethnicity, race? As Hilmes has it, the idea that radio would 'naturally' unify the nation 'masked implicit assumptions about exactly which aspects of the "national culture" were inherently more worthy of universal acceptance than others'.⁹³ In the case of the BBC, with its moral codes and radio manners, this meant smoothing off or excluding class-bound notions of disorder, immediacy, and noise at the expense of the order and calm of middle-class leisure.⁹⁴ Certain sounds were selected to represent national qualities, used to construct national character, and delimit the nation.

Securing the Aural Border

Writing on 'Radio and the Nations', Arnheim outlined a position of radio idealism: 'today a voice singing, teaching, preaching, conquering, going everywhere, coming from everywhere and making the whole world instant participators in everything ... Wireless without prejudice serves everything that implies dissemination and community of feeling and works against separateness and isolation'.⁹⁵ The postwar moment, however, saw many keen to assert Britain's difference, accentuating these very ideas of separateness and isolation that radio had supposedly overcome, and finding other ways to secure the aural border. This final section opens out onto a bigger picture of how sounds were being managed and maintained in postwar Europe.

Geopolitics became techno-politics. The British government had torpedoed plans for a European Broadcasting Alliance, intended to develop a European consciousness by enabling listeners across the continent to follow international events via a web of interconnected landlines, as the end of war neared.⁹⁶ Shortly afterwards, the government decided that the BBC's overseas broadcasting was vital to Britain's Cold War foreign policy, and subtly reworked international frequency plans so as not to hinder its own

⁹³ Hilmes, *Radio Voices*, 17

⁹⁴ Frith, 'Pleasures of the Hearth', 32

⁹⁵ Arnheim, *Radio*, 229, 232-33

⁹⁶ Lommers, *Europe – On Air*, 15-16

international broadcasting, while superficially continuing with interwar models of national service broadcasting.⁹⁷ And British policymakers teamed up with their American counterparts to denigrate Soviet jamming of BBC broadcasts, positing the freedom to listen as a universal human right. A UNESCO resolution was adopted in 1948, deeming attempts to control listening a violation of this right.⁹⁸

Domestically, meanwhile, one of a string of *Radio Times* articles on the matter, titled 'If Everyone Kept to the Plan', chastised overseas broadcasters for creating 'a fine old clamour' over the airwaves. Making reference to the most recent fixed frequency plan of 1948, the article rounded on the 'biggest sources of nonconformity in the concert of nations'. Blaming both other European nations – singling out Spain in particular – and the United States, still broadcasting in Germany, the piece ends in exasperation: 'those rugged individualists to whom the word 'plan' is anathema are creating their sickening quanta of etheric distress'.⁹⁹

Antipathy toward foreign broadcasters had previously been aimed at commercial stations, most notably Radio Luxembourg, perceived as a threat to BBC attempts to uplift and unite the nation.¹⁰⁰ But Radio Luxembourg had been accommodated, reluctantly, into international frequency plans, and British hostilities were dropped.¹⁰¹ Instead, the problem was now considered to be international stations that broke with technical regimes, compromising BBC reception and control of national listening.

Radio's internationalism – a bunch of imagined communities, imaginatively chattering to each other – was being tuned out in pursuit of an enclosed national ether. This was not the same as jamming practices that were used in wars both colonial and cold;¹⁰² this was a subtler form of guiding listeners into, and out of, listening situations. British elites were securing the aural border at

⁹⁷ Spohrer, 'Threat or Beacon', 46-47

⁹⁸ Spohrer, 'Threat or Beacon', 44

⁹⁹ Alan Hunter, 'If Everyone Kept to the Plan', *Radio Times*, 30/10/1953, 5

¹⁰⁰ Spohrer, 'Threat or Beacon', 32

¹⁰¹ Lommers, *Europe – On Air*, 173-76; Spohrer, 'Threat or Beacon', 48

¹⁰² Franz Fanon, 'This is the Voice of Algeria' in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne (London: Routledge, 2012[1965]), 329-35; Andrea Bohlman, 'Networking Poland: Radio and Music in the Cold War', MMus Dissertation, Royal Holloway, 2006, 36

home, while championing the freedom to listen elsewhere. Do wavelengths have politics? Both the Scheme and the rhetoric of well-mannered wavelength management constituted a version of what the nation was supposed to sound like: free from outside interference, clean, correct.

Carolyn Birdsall's analyses of radio note the tension between sound as disruption or interruption and the 'concurrent attempts to contain sound on the basis of community and the national'.¹⁰³ For the BBC, sonic containment amounted to training people how to listen, to determine what it meant to be a listener.¹⁰⁴ This was framed explicitly in terms of active and passive listening, with a keen awareness that the former was not inherent to the medium, and thus needed continuous performance. Active listening had been part of Reith's early BBC vision, and it again is a concept that circulates internationally. Adorno, typically splenetic, was applying his theories of regressive listening to radio in America during the war, declaiming against the medium for inducing 'spectatoritis', promoting 'a retrogressive and sometimes even infantile type of person'.¹⁰⁵ Back in Britain, a 1952 *Radio Times* article rails against 'background listening', championing 'listeners by choice', and conflating passive listening with diminishing mental powers, akin to the weakening of an inactive limb.¹⁰⁶

Scheme workers also displayed an Adornian impulse to conflate radio listening with cultural regression, albeit with shanties rather than Schoenberg as their exemplar of musical virtue. But this rubbed up against their recording work in contradictory and bizarre ways. Kennedy wrote to Sarah Makem in September 1953 to inform her that her voice was to be used as part of the theme tune for *As I Roved Out*. He wrote in the hope that Makem would 'approve of this effort', affirming that the program 'will help to counteract the harm the radio has done to kill this sort of music-making in the home'. He then signs off: 'I shall be thinking of you listening in your kitchen on Sunday'.¹⁰⁷ At no point does the reasoning behind positing passive listening as a

¹⁰³ Birdsall, *Nazi Soundscapes*, 17

¹⁰⁴ Frith, 'Pleasures of the Hearth', 29

¹⁰⁵ Theodor Adorno, 'A Social Critique of Radio Music', *The Kenyon Review*, 7: 2 (1945), 213

¹⁰⁶ Edric Cundell, 'Listening to Music', *Radio Times*, 18/1/1952, 5

¹⁰⁷ Peter Kennedy letter to Sarah Makem, 15/9/1953. BBC WAC R46/26/1 – 'As I Roved Out' File 1A 1953-1954

fundamentally *Bad Thing* move beyond the fuzzy and tenuous. And Kennedy's letter implies that the Scheme really functioned to suggest that there was a right and wrong kind of passivity, or even just a right and wrong kind of music to listen to, passively or not.

True to its roots as an institution founded to establish a market for radio sets, the BBC drilled into its listeners the message that good listening meant owning a good receiver.¹⁰⁸ The BBC Yearbook of 1952 – the year the Scheme was launched – is full of adverts for radios, and features an essay by eminent music critic Ernest Newman, in which he argues 'what we hear largely depends on our radio set; but I have no hesitation in saying that with a really good set very little is lost by listening to the wireless, while often a good deal is gained'.¹⁰⁹ *Radio Times* articles of the same year variously held listeners responsible for 'cleaning up your reception', celebrated competition between radio manufacturers as ensuring 'natural' listening, and blamed listeners as 'culprits' for not getting the best transmission.¹¹⁰ Not long afterwards, in July 1954, the Board of Trade's removal of restrictions on hire-purchase agreements for things like radios placed listening further into a proto-consumer society.¹¹¹

At stake was the issue of fidelity: listeners were assured that 'we can take it for granted that what the BBC is delivering to us is a transmission with a very high standard of realism'.¹¹² Good listening in these terms becomes being faithful to the truth of the signal, being a good consumer. Radio manufacturers had been bludgeoning audiences with this message since before the war. Philips Radio invented the 'King of the Ether' for use in an ad campaign, who sent musicians down from his kingdom to 'charm mankind with their melodious strains'. After witnessing his artists suffer through the inadequacies of a (not that) decrepit machine, he sends down an audio army who proceed to lay siege to the old radio, before wheeling in a state-of-the-art Philips model—

¹⁰⁸ Scannell and Cardiff, *A Social History of British Broadcasting*, 5

¹⁰⁹ Ernest Newman, 'The Impact of Radio on Music', *BBC Yearbook 1952* (Suffolk: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1952)

¹¹⁰ Alan Hunter, 'How You Can Improve Reception This Winter', *Radio Times*, 10/10/1952, 5-6; W. McLanachan, 'How to get the Best from your Set', *Radio Times*, 24/10/1952, 11

¹¹¹ David Kynaston, *Family Britain, 1951-57* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), 400, 664

¹¹² W. McLanachan, 'How to get the Best from your Set', 11

all 'mono knob operation', 'reading desk dial', and 'cathode ray tuning indicator'. The King of the Ether finally attaches a letter of admonishment to the ruins of the old machine: 'What do you mean by letting my best artists perform in an eight years old [sic] radio!! They can't play there! Good music can only be reproduced by modern stereophonic radio! I command you not to bother my artists any more with old and out-of-date receivers—or else'.¹¹³

The very idea of fidelity in sound recording has by now been established as the workings of various media industries; and the association of new technologies with the ideology of progress and sonic perfection stretch back to the beginnings of sound reproduction.¹¹⁴ But the BBC was particularly invested in the notion of fidelity: it had to retain the faith of its listeners in accord with its monopoly privilege and public service mission, and it was able to subsume projections of active listening and good consumerism into this faith. Monopoly depended upon good signal; interference was a technical and a political problem. Acknowledging that not everyone could afford a new radio, the BBC introduced VHF (Very High Frequency) to sound broadcasting in 1954, simultaneously encouraging listeners to keep the faith, and combatting the problem of sonic interloping from foreign stations.¹¹⁵

The Scheme, the hostility toward rogue frequencies, and responsible reception through consumer-citizenry combine to present a picture of how the BBC worked to sound the nation in the postwar moment. Field recordings become music to reveal the nation; national collectivity was delimited through the tuning out of radio internationalism; active listening, through consumption, is required to hear the nation (but not any others) properly. Each of these processes worked to define an acoustic national identity. The moral geography of the nation was authorised through sound, binding audience, public, listening, citizenship, landscape, and polity together.

¹¹³ The full eight-minute advertisement for the 'Ether Symphony' is available (and well worth viewing) at <http://vimeo.com/89092972>

¹¹⁴ Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 215-86

¹¹⁵ Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, 9

Conclusion

In asking after the politics of technologies, it remains important to trace the specific moments at which they have been politicised, mobilised, or presented as politically neutral to achieve particular goals. In the case of the Scheme, its broadcast outputs were celebrated in the pages of *English Dance and Song* magazine, relaying that 'the real star of these programmes is the recording machine ... it is indeed a tremendous debt we owe to the inventors and perfectors of recording machines. For how many of us has our first, and perhaps, our only contact with traditional singing been through a gramophone record or spool of tape'.¹¹⁶ In this account, radio reappears as contact zone, bridging populations, unifying the nation. But this could only be achieved through presenting technology as a vanishing mediator.¹¹⁷ Having completed its work, technology disappears completely. The review concludes: 'Is this not giving back to the people their own music, not as interpreted by trained musicians, but exactly as produced by themselves?'¹¹⁸

In essence, the editor is making the same claim as Rothenbuhler and Peters when they write of 'an unbroken chain from the sound in the living room to the original sound as recorded'.¹¹⁹ But the editor is making an additional claim: that the sound in the living room is the same as the sound of live performance, as though the listener is eavesdropping not on the recording process, but on traditional spaces of music making, on the nation. In this account the whole network vanishes, leaving only the singing voice and the attentive ear. This works by the logic of what Jones terms 'phonographic realism': that cultural workers must operate as recording machines in order to be socially effective; that recording technologies were objective in their representation of life and culture; that turning attention, and technologies, toward subaltern voices was inherently progressive.¹²⁰ Like Jones, I'd problematise these declarations, arguing that sound recording technologies – and the use thereof – are far from

¹¹⁶ *English Dance and Song*, 'As I Roved Out', XVIII: 3 (1953-54), 75

¹¹⁷ Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 218

¹¹⁸ *English Dance and Song*, 'As I Roved Out', 75

¹¹⁹ Eric Rothenbuhler and John Durham Peters, 'Defining Phonography: An Experiment in Theory', *Musical Quarterly*, 81: 2 (1997), 260

¹²⁰ Jones, *Yellow Music*, 107-09

objective, but that the discourse of objectivity that attends recording serves a purpose of removing the taint of class inequality.

What emerges from the aural history presented in this chapter is that the Scheme was undergirded by a preservationist impulse to maintain social segmentation and division.¹²¹ This fed into the BBC's production of the nation, and the broader aural public sphere. The Scheme wound down in 1957 with the sense that the work of collecting the nation's music was completed. Slocombe's final report and commentary claim that knowledge of national music had been transformed: in 1952 'the BBC possessed a small but not very representative collection of authentic folk recordings', whereas now the BBC sound archive held a 'representative cross-section of folklore survival in the area covered during the middle decades of this century'.¹²²

But the mediality and selectivity of the Scheme had to be glossed over in order for field recordings to index the nation. The 'Britain' recorded by the BBC has as much to do with institutional organisation and modes of capturing and representing sounds, as with the voices and musics of the populace. The collecting and representation of a national culture free from interference involved much discursive and physical work. National phonography was dependent upon internationalism. The sounding nation is built upon silences.

By securing the aural border, and imbuing the nation with phantom objectivity, the BBC constructed a form of sonic nationness, which became a source material. For the medium. For the purposes of broadcasting. But also for projects seeking to use recordings for commercial release. Kennedy had written to Slocombe early in 1951, exclaiming how he was 'listening to many fine fiddle records made by Swedish Radio which can be bought in shops in Sweden and it set me thinking about ourselves ... would it not be possible to come to some arrangement with Gramophone Company or even for BBC to sell Folk Music records'.¹²³ Slocombe's reply was that 'I have no doubt we would cooperate. But it would not be proper for any initiative to come from our end, I'm afraid. Roughly the position is we make our records for broadcasting,

¹²¹ Hilmes, *Radio Voices*, 15

¹²² Marie Slocombe, 'Stock Recording: Folk Music', 1956. BBC WAC R46/658/1 – Rec Gen 'Folk Music' 1952-59; Slocombe, 'The BBC Folk Music Collection', 12

¹²³ Peter Kennedy letter to Marie Slocombe, undated, c. January 1951. BBC WAC R46/691/1 – Rec Gen Peter Kennedy

but don't usually stand in the way of their being used by other ventures if suitably approached'.¹²⁴

The BBC's radio fieldwork would quickly connect with one such project, through which national phonography would enter into international circulation in a quite different way.

¹²⁴ Marie Slocombe letter to Peter Kennedy, 19/1/1951. BBC WAC R46/691/1 – Rec Gen Peter Kennedy

Chapter 5

‘The Sound of Mankind’:

The Columbia World Library of Folk and Primitive Music

Introduction

A 1952 contract between Columbia Records in New York and Alan Lomax, then based in the UK, reads: ‘you have transmitted to us masters and/or tapes *embodying English music* constituting approximately one hour’s playing time on a Long-Playing (LP) Microgroove record or its equivalent’.¹ Three years later, when this embodiment of English music was released in 1955, Lomax wrote in the album’s sleeve notes of the music it housed as ‘an echo from the land of melody that England must have been two centuries ago’.² And a little later again, Charles Haywood and Alan Merriam, reviewing the album as part of a larger series, commented that ‘very few [recordings] capture the feeling of totality for a country or region as these do’.³

At each stage of production, circulation, and reception there are affirmations of a clean, unproblematic connection between sound recordings and the idea of nationness: that a nation can be rendered audible; that recordings can perform an act of *dissemination*. This chapter listens to the project that prompted this discourse: *The Columbia World Library of Folk and Primitive Music*. The movement of field recordings into the marketplace marks the completion of national phonography, and here I attempt to get a handle on the various agencies compressed into the *World Library*, as Lomax, its instigator and editor, made use of the work of archivists discussed in the

¹ Contract between Columbia Records, USA and Alan Lomax, 1/2/1952. BL PK Box 9 – Columbia (USA) LP. Emphasis added

² *England* volume of the *Columbia World Library of Folk and Primitive Music* – Columbia SL-206 (1955)

³ Charles Haywood and Alan Merriam, ‘Folk and Primitive Music’, *Journal of American Folklore*, 71: 279 (1958), 86

previous chapters, and of existing networks of mid-century European ethnomusicology.

Lomax referred to the project as the 'first attempt to document the sound of mankind'.⁴ This isn't quite true. But it signals how the *World Library* was part of the same postwar utopianism we've heard already with the work of the International Folk Music Council, holding recordings of traditional musics as contributing to peace and tolerance. To claim to have documented the sound of mankind required a huge effort, involving a complex network of international collaboration, technologies, institutional support and competition, legal and aesthetic frameworks to materialise. I attempted to trace this network during four months of archival research into Lomax's work in Europe, while based at the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress.

With the *World Library*, national phonography was for sale. National musics reached listening publics in different ways, bundled together as 'world music', but particular things had to happen sonically for this to be possible. It also serves as a productive object of study in its own right: as another entextualisation of mid-century cultural politics, and attitudes toward musics and their collection; as a means of understanding more about the practices of cultural production behind the recording of the world's musics and their movement; to fathom the kinds of transnational labour – institutional, material, sonic – involved in constructing national musics; to explore how sound is treated in converting oral traditions into aural anthologies; to amplify the liminal space where scholarship and major record labels overlap.

It also requires a consideration of the medium for which it was produced: the LP. I will explore these histories and ideas by first placing Lomax's work in a longer history of world music. I will then retrace the production of the *World Library*, focusing in on the albums of English and Scottish music, before considering this anthology in relation to developments in music production and format and to other commercial releases of world music of the same period. Finally, this chapter posits the *World Library* as the culmination of the logics of collecting contained within national phonography, hearing it as a

⁴ Alan Lomax letter to Columbia Records, 29/8/1953. ALC 24.15.29 (1/2) – Bills, Financial Material, 1953

museum of voice, and asking who is being heard through this cultural production.

Folking and Primitivising

The first task is to make sense of its incredible title: 'Columbia', 'world', 'library', 'folk', and 'primitive' are terms that combine to create a feast for critical analysis. A full account of the genealogy and politics of each term is beyond my scope here, but perhaps the best way to get stuck in is by saying that that 'world', 'folk', and 'primitive' stand, in the twentieth century at least, as Western constructs for the classification and circulation of sounds and sound objects.⁵ Musics and recordings of those musics were classified with these terms through the twentieth century. This section places the *World Library* within this history, mapping its genesis in relation to earlier related endeavours, and exploring how it built upon the work of national phonographers in Britain, across Europe, and elsewhere.

The *World Library* speaks to ethnographic field recording more broadly in its modern means of production coupled with its representations of music as pre- or anti-modern. As constructs for circulation (and similar to the politics of culture discussed in Chapter Three), the terms folk and primitive serve to present peoples and musics as existing uncontemporaneously from those doing this subjectifying through the power of definition.⁶ Ana María Ochoa terms this splitting of time a 'division of sonic labour',⁷ which captures the use of modern technologies to represent aesthetic stasis that is a feature of the *World Library*. By writing of the volume of English music as 'an echo from the land of melody that England must have been two centuries ago', Lomax suggests that his microphone was dialled into the traces of pre-industrial history, re-sounding the nation. And he was therefore following the logics of national phonography.

⁵ Fred Myers, "Primitivism", *Anthropology, and the Category of "Primitive Art"* in *Handbook of Material Culture*, ed. Chris Tilley, et al (London: Sage, 2006), 267

⁶ Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Myers, "Primitivism", 269

⁷ Ana María Ochoa, 'Sonic Transculturation, Epistemologies of Purification and the Aural Public Sphere in Latin America', *Social Identities* 12: 6 (2006), 817

Recording the world's music was not a new idea in the 1950s. From the very onset of the recording industry, commercial labels – alongside and sometimes in collaboration with folklorists, anthropologists, philologists, and enthusiasts – were active in making recordings and establishing markets globally.⁸ This history is also one of interconnection between sound archives and colonial outposts and administrations; and many recordings were made with educational or preservationist intentions, which may or may not have been connected with commercial motivations.

Despite the overlaps, commercial ventures drew the ire of academically inclined folklorists: George Herzog wrote in 1936, 'the commercial companies can hardly be relied upon to put out authentic records of primitive music. The pseudo-primitive or the broken down primitive melody is considered more saleable'; Béla Bartók went even further, announcing the following year, 'it is well known that these companies are also busy recording the folk music of exotic countries; those records are bought by the natives, hence the expected profit is there. However, as soon as sales diminish for whatever reasons, the companies withdraw the records from circulation and the matrices are most likely melted down'. This, for Bartók, 'represents vandalism', and he encouraged nations to legislate against such wanton destruction, trumpeting: 'the radio and gramophone, therefore, will sooner or later develop into a calamity equivalent to any of the seven Egyptian plagues, even topping them, because the spread of these devices is infinite'.⁹

It's a familiar refrain—often repeated and resounding still. Lomax, for his part, riffed on the entropy theme with his concept of 'cultural grey-out': a process of homogenisation that would unhook music from communities.¹⁰ So

⁸ Kay Kaufman Shelemay, 'Recording Technology, the Record Industry, and Ethnomusicological Scholarship', in *Comparative Musicology and Anthropology of Music*, ed. Nettl and Bohlman (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 279-81; Pekka Gronow and Ilpo Saunio, *An International History of the Recording Industry*, trans. Christopher Moseley (London: Cassell, 1998)

⁹ George Herzog, *Research in Primitive and Folk Music in the United States* (Washington, DC: American Council of Learned Societies, 1936), 20. Béla Bartók, 'Mechanical Music' (1937), in *Béla Bartók Essays*, ed. Benjamin Suchoff (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), 294-5

¹⁰ Alan Lomax, 'Appeal for Cultural Equity' (1977), in *Alan Lomax: Selected Writings, 1934-1997*, ed. Ronald D. Cohen (London: Routledge, 2003), 285. Sidestepping an assessment of the veracity of this statement, the frequency with which such sentiments can be found in the history – and present – of musical folklore and

he was far from alone in his interpretation of cultural struggle. Likewise, the words *folk* and *primitive* – which may now sound problematic and/or racist – were still standard terms at the time. Two of Lomax's mentors used them. Herzog, with whom Lomax took classes at Columbia University in 1939 and later collaborated, used both terms in the title of an influential book.¹¹ Charles Seeger, whom Lomax called 'one of my dearest friends, if not the person whom I have loved and respected most ... the strongest intellectual motivation I had came from you and from what I had made for myself out of your ideas', built both words into his mapping of ethnomusicology as a discipline.¹²

Lomax thus shared with most of his contemporaries the anxiety of ruined tropics, lost authenticity, change as disorder, pure products going crazy.¹³ The sleeve of each volume of the World Library was inscribed:

The folk songs of rural Europe and America are linked with the musics of older civilisation and these again with the chants of primitive man ... All these musics have proved their importance by expressing the profoundest feelings of humanity across centuries of time and by surviving into our day. All are threatened to be engulfed by the roar of our powerful society with its loudspeakers all turned in one direction. Yet each primitive song style has something warm and charming to say, each one has some contribution to make to the music that is to come. It will be a colourless future if we allow this great human organ with its infinity of stops to be forever silenced.¹⁴

ethnomusicology lends weight to Ochoa's assessment of traditional musics as an 'inexhaustible fountain of musical youth', always around to sonically recharge cultural-political arguments and agendas—Ochoa, 'Sonic Transculturation', 807

¹¹ Herzog's formulation of these musics contained a preservationist impulse and rendered change undesirable. He was opposed to folk festivals and 'artificial' cultural contact as this 'may complicate the scholar's task'—Herzog, *Research in Primitive and Folk Music*, 49

¹² Alan Lomax letter to Charles Seeger, 22/8/1954. ALC 23.06.05 (2/17) – Charles Seeger Correspondence; Charles Seeger, 'Semantic, Logical and Political Considerations Bearing Upon Research in Ethnomusicology', *Ethnomusicology*, 5: 2 (1961), 77–80

¹³ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 4–5

¹⁴ *Columbia World Library of Folk and Primitive Music* – Columbia SL-204 – KL-5174; John Szwed, *The Man Who Recorded the World: A Biography of Alan Lomax* (London: Heinemann, 2010), 274

The notion of cultural degradation was a motivating force behind, and was indeed written into, the *World Library*. At the same time, the project was informed by several other factors.

An enthusiasm for new technologies marked Lomax's career, and his gathering and collating of world musics was facilitated by the recent availability of magnetic tape and the advent of the LP.¹⁵ He had also sought to drum up enthusiasm for a collaboratively produced set of albums of the world's music at the IFMC conference of 1950, held in Indiana; his proposals met with a whimper, encouraging him to undertake the task himself. Most pressingly, his name appeared in *Red Channels*, accusing him of Communist influence in American radio and television in the same year, making it a very good time to leave the country and embark upon what would result in eight years' work in Europe.¹⁶

It was a project bound up with mid-century ideas about culture collecting. It was an outcome of the competing internationalisms of the Cold War. It was an effort to stake out a place for certain traditional musics in a shifting cultural climate. And it was born of Lomax's political desire to open up channels of communication by using the tools of the culture industry against itself, and, more broadly, to use the past to make a better future. All of which can be found in a letter Lomax wrote to BBC Head of Central Programme Operations, Brian George, hoping to use existing recordings made by the BBC to make up his albums of British music:

It is only in the last generation that good recordings, taken from authentic singers in their own places have been made. Now they exist by the hundreds and must be published in such a form that the general public may hear them. This can only be done by a large commercial house. Such publication, now undertaken by Columbia, is bound to

¹⁵ Philip Bohlman writes: 'The history of recording technology unfolds in relatively strict counterpoint with the history of world music itself, anchoring it in the materiality of wax cylinders, long-playing records, magnetic tape, audio and video cassettes, and the digital media of CDs and MP3s'—Bohlman, 'Introduction: World Music's Histories' in *The Cambridge History of World Music*, 5

¹⁶ Szwed, *The Man who Recorded the World*, 247-50; Lomax, 'Saga of a Folksong Hunter' (1960), in *Selected Writings*, 179

enrich world culture, deepen human understanding and forward the ideals of tolerance and freedom.¹⁷

This is not the kind of rhetoric usually associated with major label record releases. But contra to easy arguments about major labels, a monolithic culture industry and musical expropriation – arguments that Lomax made himself, vividly characterising ‘canned music made in Tin Pan Alley, bottled in movie studios and recording salons, and poured out at a helpless public through millions of black loudspeakers’ – his ideas fell upon favourable ears high up the ranks at Columbia.¹⁸

Goddard Lieberson was born in England in 1911, raised in Washington State, was politically active by the time he moved to New York in 1939, had accompanied John Hammond on recording trips in the southern United States and been stage manager for Hammond’s ‘Spirituals to Swing’ concerts. He was musically omnivorous and supported pop recordings to pay for Columbia’s Masterworks division, and rose through the ranks to become President of the label in 1956.¹⁹ Columbia had its own history of releasing folk music before Lomax came along: with an on and off ownership of Okeh Records, and with its own American Folk Music and Blues Division. It was Lieberson who gave the go-ahead, although not the money, to compile a world library, and Lomax set sail for Europe on 24 September 1950.

After travelling briefly, he began work in Paris, based at the Musée de l’Homme, writing to folklorists and ethnomusicologists, and attending anthropologists’ parties in what was then the intellectual capital of Europe.²⁰ Lomax planned to do no fieldwork for the *World Library*, instead building a network of

¹⁷ Alan Lomax letter to Brian George, BBC, 2/1/1951. BBC WAC R21/37 – Gram Corres Columbia Records Inc. World Folk Music, 1951-54

¹⁸ Alan Lomax, *The Skiffle Album: Folk Songs Popularised by Alan Lomax and The Ramblers* (London: B. Feldman and Co, 1957), unpaginated

¹⁹ Gary Marmorstein, *The Label: The Story of Columbia Records* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2007), 132-7, 228

²⁰ Tony Judt writes of Paris in the aftermath of World War II as the only city in Europe that could ‘reflect and define the cultural condition of the continent as a whole ... France was once again the natural European home of the disinherited intellectual, a clearing house for modern European thought and politics’—Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (London: Vintage Books, 2010), 209-10

collaborators and fellow anthologists—scholars who would assemble recordings and write sleeve notes for their nation of expertise under Lomax's overall editorship. He wrote to colleagues and potential collaborators across Europe, in South America, in Australasia, in Africa, in Asia. He wrote to John Lorne Campbell on the island of Canna:

A world library of folk and primitive music ... The Columbia Record Company of New York has asked me to assemble material for this library for them – one long-playing 12 inch record – about one hour of music from every nation or region – and all the material authentic folk song, recorded wherever possible in the field from country singers and players ... What is the scope of your own collection? Would you be willing to help edit the British record?

Actually the conditions of this publication are, for the scientist and folk music enthusiast practically ideal. Columbia does a fine technical job. They are leaving it up to me and to my colleagues such as Seeger, Herzog, Schiffner [sic. André Schaeffner], etc., about what should be included. I think that in two or three years a musical library of the peoples of the world might be a reality—and out of that will come the use of long-playing master records to preserve all our best things from decay.²¹

He wrote to Valentine Britten, BBC Gramophone librarian, to explain he was seeking 'records by real country singers and musicians, choirs, etc., the real authentic article – of good acoustic quality – and of both scientific and (some) popular interest'.²² Britten pointed him in the direction of Maud Karpeles of the IFMC and Douglas Kennedy of the EFDSS.²³ Lomax entered immediately into the core of national phonography in postwar Britain.

²¹ Alan Lomax letter to John Lorne Campbell, 10/10/1950. ALC 04.02.05 (2/2) – Correspondence, Index

²² Alan Lomax letter to Valentine Britten, 12 October 1950. BBC WAC R46/309/2 – Rec. Gen. Alan Lomax, File 2: 1947-51

²³ Valentine Britten letter to Alan Lomax, 17 October 1950. BBC WAC R46/309/2 – Rec. Gen. Alan Lomax, File 2: 1947-51

He sought further help from the BBC, with whom he had already worked when broadcasting Transatlantic Call through CBS between 1943-45, asking his contact D.G. Bridson to 'round up all the material available in BBC and in England on disc so that I can listen to all of it in one place at one time and maybe sit right down then and there with my Magnecorder and make the copies'.²⁴ Bridson replied that he could not perform such a task, as records were 'scattered all over the various gramophone libraries, and would make a pile a few feet high'.²⁵ Lomax soon swapped Paris for London, arriving in December, which would become his base of operations for much of the decade.²⁶ He quickly enlisted Peter Kennedy to co-produce the *England* album.

Plans and processes of cultural production were being developed with global scope. Lomax's diaries contain strings of countries for his library and people to do the work: a to-do list from early 1951 reveals he was planning to write to contacts in Norway, Yugoslavia, Portugal, India, China, and to travel to the Soviet Union under the direction of Alan Bush, whom he had met in Durham in April that year. Elsewhere, collating other lists allows the full scope of the projected *World Library* to emerge: albums were mooted, planned, proposed, scraped together, scrapped altogether, completed, rejected, or forgotten for (in Lomax's words) French Africa, British East Africa, North Africa, South Africa, Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, Chile, Mexico, the West Indies, American Indian music, North America, Canada, Australia and New Guinea, New Zealand, Polynesia, Japan, The Ryukyus, Formosa and Korea, Indonesia, Far East, Indo-China—Malaysia, Arab World, Palestine, Israel, Greece and Turkey, Soviet Union, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania,

²⁴ Alan Lomax letter to D.G. Bridson, 25/10/1950. BBC WAC R46/309/2 – Rec. Gen. Alan Lomax, File 2: 1947-51

²⁵ D.G. Bridson letter to Alan Lomax, 03/11/1950. BBC WAC R46/309/2 – Rec. Gen. Alan Lomax, File 2: 1947-51

²⁶ If Lomax didn't like Paris, he wasn't much fonder of London. He called it a 'monstrous town' in his diary: 'You just have to learn to buy your courage up as you fight your way through the coils of the monster. I understand why everyone prefers to live in the country and come in as seldom as possible. I also understand well that this great monster of administrative imperialism is dying—really half dead already ... Can Britain, with a careful small-time capitulation to socialistic principles, manage to survive. I think not. One day, the last of the profitable overseas links will be snapped. Then 50,000,000 will find themselves floating on a grey Atlantic Channel without enough to eat. There will be no time to be evil then'. ALC 07.03.22 – Diary, 1951

Norway, Sweden, Finland, Holland & Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, France, Ireland, Scotland, and England.²⁷ Of the eighteen volumes that were released (fourteen in 1955, four appearing subsequently), Scotland and Spain were compiled by Lomax, with some assistance, mostly containing recordings he made himself; five more – Ireland, England, Yugoslavia, and two Italian volumes – he edited in collaboration with others; and eleven (French Africa, France, Australia and New Guinea, Indonesia, Canada, Venezuela, British East Africa, Japan and Korea, India, Bulgaria, and Romania) were assembled by experts working in each respective area.

Each album has its own story, then. Even within Europe (where Lomax ended up doing fieldwork and making his own recordings—in Ireland, Scotland, Spain and Italy), the political climates and institutional and disciplinary configurations, in various nations after World War II, were starkly different.²⁸ The networks through which the *World Library* was produced, though, were very much international. So it should at once be considered as a whole, and understood as a series of discrete entities: objects within an object set. To make sense of this, I turn now to the labours and production practices involved in assembling a world library.

Making World Music

Much of this work can be deemed institutional labour, in that Lomax was operating through and seeking collaboration with institutions both large and small. Inevitably this informed and inflected Lomax's actions and the production of the *World Library*. He was always keen to stress his institutional connections, stretching from his previous work at the Library of Congress, through his present engagement with Columbia, and into future archival

²⁷ ALC 07.03.04, England etc. 1951 – Field Notes Diary; 07.03.06, Britain, etc.; 07.03.23, Britain; 07.03.25, France 1952 Diary

²⁸ I am grateful to Goffredo Plastino for highlighting to me the differences between Lomax's work in Britain to that in Spain and Italy: in Spain, Lomax was completely unwelcome by the folklore establishment; in Italy, he was welcomed but went against the recommendations of folk music authorities. For detail of Lomax in Italy, see Plastino, 'Un Sentimento Antico', in *Alan Lomax, L'Anno più felice della mia vita. Un viaggio in Italia 1954-1955*, ed. Goffredo Plastino (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2008), 16-86. See also Szwed, *The Man Who Recorded the World*, 270-88

deposits of his collection. The *World Library* was to be 'a real monument', Lomax wrote in a diary entry.²⁹

He played on prestige in approaching folklorists and collectors to work with him; even more so with the singers and performers whose voices and bodies were to be assembled on the discs, as evinced in Lomax's writing to Scottish musicians whose recordings he wanted to use:

Thank you for your songs, which will be listened to by scholars and just ordinary people with the greatest interest and pleasure. The people of Scotland recorded about 25 hours of their folksongs this summer. The whole set will go to the University of Edinburgh folklore archive for the permanent benefit of the Scottish people. Some will go to the BBC Permanent Records Library, some will be published by the Columbia Records Company in New York City, and some will be used in my BBC broadcasts. And all will end up in a museum in the U.S.³⁰

As well as using prestige to build connections and secure access, Lomax shuttled between institutions in securing an income for himself during his time in Europe. As well as funding his work on the back of his, not uncontroversial, share of royalties from 'Goodnight, Irene', he was paid regularly by the BBC for producing programmes for the Home Service and Third Programme, Columbia sent him advances of \$3000 in 1952 and \$1000 in 1953, and UNESCO paid him 52,500 Francs in the Autumn of 1953 for twelve radio programmes of fifteen minutes, built from the recordings he had gathered making the *World Library*, and to be made available to broadcasters globally.³¹

Not only did they finance the *World Library*, these institutions shaped its content. Szwed gives the example of Lomax's reluctance to work in Spain while Franco was in power, but being forced to by Columbia's insistence on a Spanish album to sate the appetite for Spanish guitar and flamenco music in

²⁹ ALC 07.03.25, France 1952 Diary

³⁰ Alan Lomax letter to Scottish performers, undated. ALC 04.02.12 (1/3), British Isles – Radio Scripts, Transcripts, Correspondence

³¹ Alan Lomax letter to Charles Seeger, 22/8/1954. ALC 23.06.05 (2/17) – Charles Seeger Correspondence; ALC 24.15.29 (1/2), Bills, Financial Material, 1953

the United States.³² Lomax's politics were always entwined with the exigencies of producing work for listening publics in America, feeding postwar fascinations with Europe that Lomax himself had helped to foster through Transatlantic broadcasting in wartime. This anthology was produced according to a sensibility of what I'd like to term the audio-exoteric: a project of writing sound constructed specifically for communication to the general public. So when Martin Stokes prompts us to think about music in a global field of translation – in which, drawing on literary theory, 'originals may be produced with translation in mind, and thus, in a sense, already be "translated" at the point of origin' – we can bring this thought to the *World Library*: the audio-exoteric is compressed into what we hear at, or even before, the point of production, in efforts to legitimate and disseminate certain musics and musical traditions.³³

Put another way, Lomax was enmeshed – arguably more enmeshed than most folklorists – in the mechanisms of commerce and mass media, deeming this a necessary move in questing for what he later termed cultural equity. He proclaimed to Brian George that the *World Library* would 'present the oral tradition in all its magnificence and on equal terms with the tradition of written music', and that 'authentic folklore does not yet compete with Bing Crosby or, even, Béla Bartók'.³⁴ Later he wrote to Charles Seeger to defend the project on the grounds that 'the most important fact about our series is that the richest and most powerful record company is willing to publish our field results and that other such companies may follow suit'.³⁵ And Lomax had form on

³² Szwed, *The Man who Recorded the World*, 269

³³ Martin Stokes, 'On Musical Cosmopolitanism', *The Macalester International Roundtable* (2007), 13 – <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/intlrtable/3>

³⁴ Alan Lomax letter to Brian George, 2/1/1951. BBC WAC R21/37 – Gram Corres Columbia Records Inc. World Folk Music, 1951-54. Being folklorists enmeshed in the mechanisms of commerce was the Lomax family trade, John A. Lomax having earlier had a successful career bridging the gaps between the music industries, academic folklore, and the lecture circuit. Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010)

³⁵ Alan Lomax letter to Charles Seeger, 2/5/1956. ALC 23.06.05 (2/17) – Charles Seeger Correspondence. Lomax was responding here to Seeger's not entirely positive review of the *World Library* in the IFMC's journal. Seeger, 'Columbia World Library of Folk and Primitive Music', *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, 8 (1956), 113-14. Lomax wrote to Seeger that the *World Library* was a product of his

this, compiling a *List of American Folksongs on Commercial Records* in 1942, and describing this music as being 'in a healthier condition, roving the radio stations and recording studios than it has been or ever will be in the notebooks of collectors'.³⁶

Not everyone shared his opinions, though, and upon his arrival Lomax tapped into a cool seam of suspicion in Britain that conflated his culture collecting and connections to commerce with an Americanised consumer society and commodification. From this footing, he was perhaps not helped by the British media, which published articles making such connections explicit (Figure 5.1).

THE DAILY MIRROR Wednesday, February 28, 1951

THROUGH THE SWING DOOR

**Mr. Lomax finds them—
Tin Pan Alley
plugs them**

ALAN LOMAX
"I like to eat."

ROBIN ROBERTS
"Every man's dream"

ALAN is a folk song specialist—he looks like a fished-down Orson Welles—not only because he believes that folk songs "contain all the genius of the human race," but they have a commercial value, too. It was Alan a compact six-footer

from Texas who "discovered" the recent commercial top song, "Good-night, Irene" when he visited the late Huddie Ledbetter—better known as Lead Belly—in a Louisiana gaol.

Folk-lore is in the family. From 1939-48 Alan worked with his father, the late John Lomax, in compiling 12,000 folk song recordings for the U.S. Library of Congress.

It was John Lomax who gave Tin Pan Alley the song, "Home on the Range"—after he recorded it by a coloured cook.

Last October Alan decided to explore the European folk market, and after Christmas he and singer Robin Roberts did a one

month tour of Ireland. They recorded 200 songs in Gaelic on their £250 56lb portable wire machine.

Commented Alan: "The songs were five hundred years old and they were the most exquisite things I have ever heard—but they weren't commercial."

THE two highlights of the trip were a folk song expert who accompanied them with a gallon jar of whiskey that was refilled every morning—"I had to flex my muscles for that," says Alan—and the girl who sang "Good-night, Irene" in Gaelic.

Alan's trouble is that most folk songs aren't considered fit for public consumption unless edited.

When Alan has finished with England he and Robin go to France—and we'll just keep going round the world until the money runs out.

Back to Paris will be like going home to Robin, who recently sang for a month in the St. Germain des Pres night club, the "Abbaye."

Robin, every man's dream in a sweater, said: "There's nothing like a Paris night club for meeting your old American college friends."

Robin's job on Alan's tour is "to keep them talking and get them singing, otherwise a lot of them won't record for us."

In England two music publishers have already approached Alan for the rights of his British album—in case there's a hit tune there.

But although Alan doesn't mind his work being commercialised—"I like to eat"—he believes that folk songs are more important than Tin Pan Alley.

In a recent U.S. propaganda "Voice of America" broadcast to China, they played some of Alan's recordings of American mid-West fiddle tunes.

"The Chinese loved them," he said. "I think there's a moral in that somewhere."

Douglas Howell

Figure 5.1: 'Mr Lomax finds them - Tin Pan Alley plugs them', *Daily Mirror*, 28/2/1951

influence; that it 'belonged to you in sense'. Seeger received 1% of royalties for each album, despite not being involved in any of the recording or editing. This also upset Lomax: 'I suffered one of the cruellest blows of my life when you were so cautious about participating and when you told me in Paris that you could not participate because you were afraid of being involved in this'—Alan Lomax letter to Charles Seeger, 22/8/1954. ALC 23.06.05 (2/17) – Charles Seeger Correspondence

³⁶ Alan Lomax, *List of American Folk Songs on Commercial Records* (Washington, DC: Archive of American Folk Song, Library of Congress, 1942), 1

Linking Lomax to Tin Pan Alley, linking his sound recording with his food shopping, describing his visit as an exploration of the 'European folk market'—these things did not sit kindly with many of those already working in the field. Francis Collinson, for instance, felt compelled to write to the BBC from Scotland: 'I have been not a little uneasy about the activities of Alan Lomax, who appears to be making a raid upon the folksongs of this country for the purposes of commercial recording of these by American recording companies'.³⁷ This in turn prompted Marie Slocombe to write to producers at BBC Glasgow to distance the Corporation from Lomax amid these rumblings.³⁸

Initially keen on the project, John Lorne Campbell wrote to Lomax that there should be a volume of Scottish music, rather than a single LP to represent Britain: 'One stipulation I must make is that these recordings are published as part of a Scottish collection and not as part of a 'United Kingdom' or 'British' collection. There is no such thing as 'British' folksong, indeed it is on the folk level that Scottish national characteristics are most strongly maintained'.³⁹ He offered a list of types of song that should be included, and agreed to gather a selection of his own recordings made in the Outer Hebrides for the *World Library*. Yet he was spooked by Lomax's conditional agreement to a Scotland LP, on the grounds that recordings should be sufficiently 'pleasing' for the album to sell well, and not only backed out of the project but tried to prevent Lomax working in Scotland at all.⁴⁰ It was because of this suspicion that Lomax ventured to Scotland to make his own recordings.

³⁷ Francis Collinson letter to Brian George, 24/7/1951. BBC WAC R21/37 – Gram Corres Columbia Records Inc. World Folk Music, 1951-54

³⁸ Marie Slocombe letter to BBC Glasgow, 17/8/1951. BBC WAC R46/309/2 – Rec. Gen. Alan Lomax, File 2: 1947-51

³⁹ John Lorne Campbell letter to Alan Lomax, 14/11/1950. ALC 04.02.26 (2/4) (1/2), British Isles – Correspondence

⁴⁰ Full contents and some analysis of this correspondence are in Ray Perman, *The Man who Gave Away his Island* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2010), 133-40

Hamish Henderson, whom Lomax met in London in March 1951, also stressed the importance of a separate Scottish album.⁴¹ Arriving in Scotland that summer, Lomax went first to Edinburgh and the newly founded School of Scottish Studies. Here he received a crash course in Scottish culture, and enlisted the help of Henderson, who became Lomax's guide and co-fieldworker in the North East, and of Calum Maclean, who wrote to singers he knew in the Hebrides to facilitate Lomax's fieldwork. Maclean later wrote to Lomax from Uppsala, praising his work:

You have opened up a new area in Scotland and showed what an experienced folk-music collector can do ... I do not regret any little part I took in helping you and I have told Angus MacIntosh, who is a gem and the best man in Scotland, that I make no apology for having done so ... Again my heartiest congratulations and thanks for what you have done for our country.⁴²

The 25 hours of recordings Lomax made in Scotland were among the first deposited in the School of Scottish Studies sound archive. Side A of the *Scotland* LP was made up of recordings of Scots music from the Lowlands; Side B consisted of Gaelic song and mouth music from the Hebrides.

⁴¹ 'Met blonde Hamish Henderson today, who is the nicest person I have met in the British Isles ... the conversation was extremely important. Hamish feels that Scotland is the most interesting and important place on earth, with a real live people's culture, now on the march—and, I must say, he made me share his feeling'. ALC 07.03.22 – Diary, 1951

⁴² Calum Maclean letter to Alan Lomax, 5/12/1951. ALC 04.02.23 (1/2), Field Work – British Isles – Correspondence, Transcripts, Musical Notation. Helping Lomax created a rift between Maclean and Campbell. Maclean wrote to Lomax again from Uppsala, where he was trying to arrange a Swedish album for the *World Library* with Matts Arnberg: 'I hear Campbell of Canna and his friends are on the verge of a nervous breakdown. I hope they stay like that'. Calum Maclean letter to Alan Lomax, undated c. early 1952. ALC 04.02.26 (2/4) (1/2), British Isles – Correspondence. Lomax, for his part, seems to have had mixed feelings about Scotland. On the one hand, he was full of praise for the people he met and their music: 'The Scots character shining out—the clan lives—the determination—the wordiness—the enthusiasm—the carefulness and the implosiveness—intellectuals'. On the other, 'I hate Scotland. It's small and cold and querulous, like a great beauty now sitting in a rustic cottage writing glamorous letters to young men'. ALC 07.03.22 – Diary, 1951; 07.03.04 – England, etc. 1951—Field Notes Diary

Although dependent on the School's fieldworkers for the *Scotland* album, Lomax brought his own aesthetics to its production. He included some urban music, beginning the album with a BBC recording of the Glasgow Police Band. He had no problem using his own recordings of relatively young professional singers and actors alongside the kinds of tradition bearers recorded by the School, featuring Isla Cameron and Ewan MacColl and even Hamish Henderson on Side A of the *Scotland* record. (Cameron and MacColl also featured on the *England* album, being used to represent the north of England and industrial song.) Every recording Lomax copied or made had a particular purpose and a particular place in his collection.

There is another reason for John Lorne Campbell's refusal to work with Lomax that links back to institutional labour and, ultimately, competition. Campbell was President of the Folklore Institute of Scotland (FIOS), which had published, under the auspices of the Linguaphone Institute, a set of five twelve-inch discs of Gaelic music in 1950.⁴³ That FIOS intended to continue releasing anthologies of its own was the reason Campbell formally gave for rejecting Lomax's advances: 'we prefer to retain the best of our Gaelic folksong recordings for publication in such an album, especially as very careful work will be necessary upon the texts and translations of such songs'.⁴⁴

So the *World Library* was far from the only project sounding out traditional musics. Other international projects were up and running: Romanian ethnomusicologist Constantin Brăiloiu was working with UNESCO on releasing his *Collection Universelle de Musique Populaire Enregistrée* (1951-58) on 78s; Laura Boulton was releasing LPs of various nations' musics through Folkways Records. Lomax was aware of these other projects and felt threatened by them. 'Boulton is very aggressive and is after my job', he wrote in his diary in 1952; 'There can't be two competing series'.⁴⁵

⁴³ John Lorne Campbell letter to Alan Lomax, 18/11/1950. ALC 04.02.12 (2/3), British Isles – Research Notes – Correspondence

⁴⁴ John Lorne Campbell letter to Alan Lomax, 10/12/1950. ALC 04.02.12 (3/3), British Isles – Transcripts, Research Notes, Correspondence

⁴⁵ ALC 07.03.25, France 1952 Diary. When starting out on his project, Lomax had written of his desire to work with Brăiloiu, 'so that our plans will dovetail and supplement one another'. Alan Lomax letter to John Lorne Campbell, 10/10/1950. ALC 04.02.05 (2/2) – Correspondence, Index. Lomax began his fieldwork in Spain with

On top of this, the early to mid-1950s marked a period of renewed interest amongst major labels in world music, linked to socio-technological developments enabling increased tourist travel, and an awareness of the sales potential of authenticity. Keir Keightley has recovered the story of Capitol Records 1956 series *Capitol of the World*, which wore its authenticity quite literally on its sleeve: 'Recorded in the country of the music's origins | Captured in flawless high-fidelity | A remarkable series of albums for world music-travellers'.⁴⁶ It was against such works that the *World Library* was positioned.

Competition for Lomax existed both synchronically and diachronically. As well as competing with other concurrent anthological projects, he was striving for discovery. He became frustrated in Scotland, for instance, writing in his diary on 16 July 1951:

This is the second day of the bothy ballad country of Scotland. Here Ford, Ord and Gavin Greig have preceded me, not to speak of the BBC trucks. There is absolutely no chance of recording anything unrecorded, of saving anything unsaved. Old trails, old tunes, old singers and old stuff. I'm growing more and more irritated. At least one should be employed in searching out something new and desperate to be known.⁴⁷

Despairing at 'old stuff' while claiming to be (re-) presenting traditions may seem to be a contradiction in terms, but this comment begins to make sense when viewed through the lens of competition. Linked to institutional labour and the recordist's aesthetic preferences, competition becomes entextualised into field recordings themselves. Which is to say that another reading of the 'field' in field recording is one of cultural production, as

Brăiloiu, after they drove from Paris to Barcelona and on to Palma de Mallorca, where the latter man was speaking at a conference. They were also in correspondence about Spanish and Swiss albums for the *World Library*. 07.03.25 – France 1952 Diary. For more on Boulton, see Aaron Fox, 'Repatriation as Reanimation through Reciprocity' in *The Cambridge History of World Music*, ed. Bohlman, 522-54

⁴⁶ In Simon Frith, 'The Discourse of World Music' in *Western Music and its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*, ed. Born and Hesmondhalgh (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 309

⁴⁷ ALC 07.03.04, England etc. 1951 – Field Notes Diary

explicated by Bourdieu, in which individuals and institutions are engaged in constant competition and position-taking for cultural legitimacy.⁴⁸

Format Errors

While on the one hand Lomax was competing with other recordists in his efforts to canonise himself as well as his work, on the other hand he was reliant upon them to build the *World Library*. As well as working with and making use of the resources of the BBC, the School of Scottish Studies, and the EFDSS, Lomax also utilised the trans-European connections available through the IFMC. This section takes a closer listen to how these connections gave Lomax access to recordings, but how recordings created as many problems as they solved.

Lomax sent Peter Kennedy to the IFMC conference of 1951, held in Opatija—then Yugoslavia, now Croatia. There, Kennedy recorded music and dance at concerts organised for the conference as a nation building exercise by the Yugoslav Council for Science and Culture, held in a hotel ballroom. ('The acoustics of the hall were very unsatisfactory—like a big swimming bath!'⁴⁹) These recordings would be edited into the *Yugoslavia* album of the *World Library*. Lomax arranged permissions for Kennedy to do this recording through the BBC, who would also produce a broadcast report on the festival. The album was thus credited to Lomax, Kennedy, and the Yugoslav Council. Neither Lomax nor Kennedy knew enough about the music recorded to write the sleeve notes, which were instead written by Albert Lord of Harvard University, while Jaap Kunst, who had also attended the conference, provided photographs.⁵⁰ National musics were inscribed and released through truly international collaborations: ethnomusicological and commercial, governmental and technological.

⁴⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 1-73

⁴⁹ Peter Kennedy letter to Jaap Kunst, 19/10/1951. BL PK Box 9 – Columbia (USA) LP

⁵⁰ Columbia KL-217; Marie Slocombe, 'Some Impressions of the Yugoslav Conference and Festival', *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, 4 (1952), 2-3; BBC WAC R21/37 – Gram Corres Columbia Records Inc. World Folk Music, 1951-54; Jaap Kunst letter to Peter Kennedy, 15/10/1951. BL PK Box 9 – Columbia (USA) LP

Back in Britain, zooming right in on a single recording allows us to examine how collaborations and competing interests were enacted. The drift of sound recordings into new networks can thus be heard more clearly. Stanyek and Piekut have recently proposed replacing the overused and wilted 'schizophonia' – a term coined by R. Murray Schafer to describe the splitting of a sound from its source through recording – with a corrective term, 'rhizophonia', which describes 'the fundamentally fragmented yet proliferative condition of sound reproduction and recording, where sounds and bodies are constantly dislocated, relocated, and co-located in temporary aural configurations'.⁵¹ It is precisely this dislocation, relocation, and co-location that characterises the movement of field recordings in the *World Library*. And I can briefly illustrate these ideas through a recording of 'Haul on the Bowlin'—the very first track on the *England* volume of the *World Library*.

The BBC arranged a recording session for 8 June 1942 in Bristol. Stanley Slade, a retired sailor and well-regarded shanty singer, was to record a number of songs onto disc, backed by a BBC chorus, with piano-accordion accompaniment for certain tracks. Slade would teach the songs he wanted to record to the professional singers, who were to set down seven or eight tracks—'Haul on the Bowlin' being one of them. The resulting recordings were then to be used for radio programmes such as *Country Magazine*, and held in the BBC sound archive as library music. Slade had initially involved himself with the BBC's sound work, frustrated by the Corporation's representation of sea shanties in broadcasts.⁵²

Several years later, the BBC sent Peter Kennedy to Bristol in 1949, in part to produce more recordings of Slade, who was increasingly intransigent with the conditions of recording for the Corporation. Kennedy had the idea of replacing the BBC chorus with people hauled in off the street, 'to get voices that weren't necessarily trained and some musical, some very un-musical, sounds; but very much natural work-song sound, because we were trying to capture that

⁵¹ Jason Stanyek and Benjamin Piekut, 'Deadness: Technologies of the Intermundane', *The Drama Review*, 54: 1 (2010), 19

⁵² Peter Kennedy interview for the British Library, May 1985, Gloucester. British Library Sounds website: <https://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history/Oral-history-of-recorded-sound/021M-C0090X0073XX-0200V0>

authentic effect'.⁵³ He made further recordings of Slade, and even arranged a studio session to record a 78 for HMV's Education Department in early 1950, only for the singer to die a week before it was scheduled to take place. Kennedy remained keen to make use of the existing recordings, and mentioned Slade specifically when writing to Marie Slocombe in January 1951 in an attempt to 'instigate a campaign' for the BBC 'to sell Folk Music records of typical English amateur talent'.⁵⁴

When Lomax enlisted Kennedy to compile and co-produce the *England* LP for the *World Library*, Slade was therefore high on the list of suggestions; and while Lomax shared Kennedy's enthusiasm, he preferred the 1942 BBC recordings to those made by Kennedy, and dubbed a handful onto tape.⁵⁵ In particular, he had no problem identifying 'Haul on the Bowlin' as aligning with his musical aesthetics, as he had already recorded a performance of the same song in America, by Richard Maitland in 1939 at Sailors' Snug Harbor, a retirement home for seamen in Staten Island, New York.⁵⁶

He consulted the BBC in July about rights ownership, but contractual negotiations were ongoing between the BBC and Columbia – with Lomax as mediator – at the time of his writing. A sticking point was Lomax's initial desire for exclusive rights being assigned to Columbia upon the *World Library's* release. And although Lomax had backed down by mid-July, his initial demand triggered a response from the BBC that would shape the *England* LP's contents. Slocombe, with one ear turned toward music history and the other toward future broadcasts, sent an internal memo on 27 July, offering a compromise on the request for recordings of Slade:

The singer is now dead and with him, so far as I know, dies the genuine tradition of shanty singing going back to the clipper ships themselves. I therefore think we would have reasonable grounds for saying that we

⁵³ Peter Kennedy interview for the British Library, May 1985

⁵⁴ Peter Kennedy letter to Marie Slocombe, undated, c. January 1951. BBC WAC R46/691/1 – Rec. Gen. Peter Kennedy

⁵⁵ These recordings have consequently become part of the Lomax materials and are available online. Stanley Slade's 'Haul on the Bowlin' can be heard at: <http://research.culturalequity.org/rc-b2/get-audio-detailed-recording.do?recordingId=12556>

⁵⁶ http://www.loc.gov/folklife/LP/SeaShantiesL26_L27_opt.pdf

would only be willing to release one (or at the very most two) of the seven or eight items we have from this particular singer.⁵⁷

Slocombe as gatekeeper here exerts her institutional authority, itself in turn impacting on which bits of Slade's voice drifted from the archive to the record rack. But further questions remain, not least concerning the implications of including a professional BBC chorus in a library of folk and primitive music.

Lomax set up his own binaries as to what was and was not folk music around musical literacy and training. He asked for 'real country singers' in his letters to archivists in England.⁵⁸ In Scotland, this binary becomes clearer and serves as the basis of selection and rejection. Lomax set himself up for a day of listening at the BBC's Glasgow Permanent Records Library, scrawling down notes as he listened, choosing not to make copies of recordings of various performers: Robert Watson was dismissed as a 'trained' singer; Ramsay Sinclair a 'horrible singer'; Dan Williams as having a 'horrible vaudeville style'; and, worst of all, Sidney McEwan as a 'sentimental crap singer'.⁵⁹ The 'trained' and the 'crap' were, for Lomax, not unconnected.

Elsewhere, an album of Norwegian music never made it past the production stage, for reasons explained by Lomax to Fredrik Wulfsberg of the Norwegian Embassy in London: 'The music is excellent, but apparently Dr Sandvik [who had collated recordings at Lomax's request] did not understand that I wished to use largely documentary recordings in the series. Therefore his records, made by singers trained in the conventional European sense, will not conform to the standards of the rest of the series and the contribution of Norway will seem rather strange'.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Marie Slocombe memo to HCPOps, 27/7/1951. BBC WAC R21/37 – Gram Corres Columbia Records Inc. World Folk Music, 1951-54

⁵⁸ Alan Lomax letter to Valentine Britten, 12/10/1950. BBC WAC R46/309/2 – Rec. Gen. Alan Lomax, File 2: 1947-51

⁵⁹ ALC 07.03.03 – Scotland Notebook. Other recordings he liked very much, such as psalm singing recorded in Lewis: 'One of the most beautiful sounds I've ever heard. Rising silver shifts of perfect unison, like great grey rollers on a calm sea—a slow powerful wind behind a great golden vessel'. ALC 07.03.03 – Scotland Notebook. This recording, of Psalm 73, made it onto the *Scotland* volume of the *World Library*

⁶⁰ Alan Lomax letter to Fredrik Wulfsberg, 4/10/1951. ALC 22.02.10, Misc. Articles

The combination of the BBC moderating access to recordings, the exigencies of the audio-exoteric in working for Columbia, and Lomax's own aesthetic frameworks coalesce to produce a limit to this sonic labour, to give shape to the *World Library*, to create an outside in which certain sounds are absented and repressed.⁶¹ This can again be heard as an example of grouping. To borrow more ANT parlance, Lomax becomes the recruiting officer, gathering the sounds to constitute the folk and the primitive in his project. He also becomes the spokesperson for the grouping – a role he gave himself ('we, who speak for the folk in the marketplace') – while trained singers become the anti-group against which various musics are assembled and accorded a new logic.⁶²

Yet there is slippage. The boundaries are permeable and leaky. The inclusion of Stanley Slade and the BBC chorus suggests that the audio-exoteric trumps the aversion to musical training, and Lomax and Kennedy had to work hard to conceal these inconsistencies and sonically translate such anomalies: in a 1956 BBC radio broadcast, as part of the series 'A Ballad Hunter Looks at Britain' in which the two men strengthened the group they had formed, Lomax passed the microphone to Kennedy, who enthused on how Slade 'took command of the astonished BBC choir like a first mate tackling a green ship's crew. Stanley was a perfectionist and often before he permitted a recording, he drove the poor choristers through a two or three-hour rehearsal, *until he had them hoarse-voiced and shouting like seamen at the ropes*. But old Stanley was always in the lead, yanking them along with his rough old shantyman's voice'.⁶³

The traces of cultural production are found elsewhere. The BBC's messy metadata caused its own problems: in struggling to track information on recordings, Brian George wrote to the BBC's Assistant Head of Programme

⁶¹ Georgina Born, 'The Social and the Aesthetic: For a Post-Bourdieuian Theory of Cultural Production', *Cultural Sociology*, 4: 2 (2010), 193-4

⁶² Lomax, 'Making Folklore Available (1950)', in *Selected Writings*, 116; Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 27-42

⁶³ BBC radio script, ALC 04.01.11 (3/4) – 'A Ballad Hunter Looks at Britain', programmes 3-4, 1956. Emphasis added. Lomax had earlier produced recordings in a similar fashion, getting Leadbelly to 'unpolish' the Golden Gate Quartet when recording for RCA in 1940. Szwed, *The Man Who Recorded the World*, 163

Contracts to admit that 'in some cases we have invented titles for material recorded by us as folk singers are apt to be rather vague about these things'.⁶⁴ Later, Kennedy wrote to Lomax that he was getting creative with his sleeve notes: 'The BBC, unfortunately, have no texts. One must either guess or hope that that the singers themselves [not all of whom were still alive] will supply the rest'.⁶⁵ His problems were not only to do with written information, either. They were also to do with sound: 'I have been trying to get on with the texts but find it very difficult to hear what the singers are saying in many cases'; 'one has to simply guess a lot of the songs owing to bad quality'.⁶⁶ And sound quality emerges as an important factor in the production of the *World Library*.

There was no volume of Welsh music. Kennedy had asked about it: 'what are you going to do about Wales, by the way, you left it rather vague?' Lomax maintained that five minutes of Welsh music on the England album would suffice: 'that will mean a close approximation of what we'd eventually like to have as the Album of Folk Music from England and Wales. They belong together as complementary musical ideas'.⁶⁷ The issue reappeared in a letter from Esme Lewis of Barry, Glamorgan. Lewis commends Lomax on his work for radio and television, but goes on to offer a mild reproach: 'one thing only has puzzled me Mr Lomax! i.e. your exclusion of Wales. You will find many beautiful folk songs here—dealing with different subjects and containing ample variety of mood in the music'. Lewis even offers to sing for Lomax, having previously recorded an album of Welsh folk songs for HMV.⁶⁸ But a Welsh album never appeared.

⁶⁴ Brian George memo to AHPC, 10/9/1951. BBC WAC R21/37 – Gram Corres Columbia Records Inc. World Folk Music, 1951-54

⁶⁵ Peter Kennedy letter to Alan Lomax, undated ca. July 1951. BL PK Box 12 – Alan Lomax Letters

⁶⁶ Peter Kennedy letter to Alan Lomax, 27/7/1951. BL PK Box 12 – Alan Lomax Letters

⁶⁷ Peter Kennedy letter to Alan Lomax, 20/8/1951; Alan Lomax letter to Peter Kennedy, 24/8/1951. BL PK Box 12 – Alan Lomax Letters

⁶⁸ Esme Lewis letter to Alan Lomax, 22/11/1953. ALC 04.02.23 (1/2), Field Work – British Isles – Correspondence, Transcripts, Musical Notation. Lomax was quoted in *Time* magazine upon his return to the USA in 1958 as saying Welsh music is 'a tragedy; everything is Methodist Hymns and Handel'—'Music Hunter', *Time*, 22/9/1958, 68

Lomax did, however, travel to Wales, making recordings in Treorchy in December 1953 (a month after Lewis's letter). He also sent letters to potential collaborators at Welsh institutions, seemingly in efforts to gather material for a Welsh album. Dora Herbert Jones of University College, Swansea, wrote back: 'the large number of records made while I was collecting these in Wales are now too faint for much use to be made of them. Only a fortnight ago the BBC ... tried to use some of these early records and found that they were useless'.⁶⁹ As well as aspects of musical performance and adherence to abstract notions of authenticity, then, issues of format, technology, and preservation impacted on the *World Library's* contents. Jones continued: 'of course, they were made on phonographs and have had no attention paid to them since they were done some 30 years ago'.

Degradation – of human voice, of recorded sound, of some imbrication of the two – reappears as a limiting factor when Argentine ethnomusicologist Isabel Aretz supplied Lomax with an LP's worth of music, only to have them rejected on sonic grounds: 'I am desolated to say that it is not ready for publication in my series. In general the difficulties are two: 1. So many of the singers are old with badly broken voices; 2. A number of the best records are rather badly distorted or have a bad surface noise ... I say that as musical folklore the material is of very high order but I am certain that many of your old men are not for the general public'.⁷⁰ The recordedness of the recordings, the degree to which technology intrudes on the listening experience, prevented Argentina's admission to the *World Library*. Lomax, perhaps with Bing and Béla still in mind, was concerned with sourcing recordings of a particular audio quality for representation in the marketplace, for communication to a large audience.

There are still more agencies and shaping factors in the production of the *World Library*. Lomax got in trouble with Sidney Newman of the University of Edinburgh for copying recordings held in the growing School of Scottish Studies sound archive without permission. Newman wrote to rebuke him: 'I

⁶⁹ Dora Herbert Jones letter to Alan Lomax, 21/5/1951. ALC 04.02.26 (2/4) (1/2), British Isles – Correspondence

⁷⁰ Alan Lomax letter to Isabel Aretz, 20/6/1952. ALC 35.01.04 – T0032-0041

must make it quite clear to you that it was entirely out of order for you to make these copies without asking the express permission of Edinburgh University, and that, although you have them on your tape, you must realise you are not at liberty to make use of them for purposes of publication or for making other copies'.⁷¹ Lomax dropped the recordings in question from his plans for the *Scotland* album.

Elsewhere, Lomax leant on the BBC to obtain recordings from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, on the understanding that they were to be used in radio broadcasts. After making copies to send to Marius Barbeau, with whom he was collaborating on a *Canada* LP, and sparking a row between the two institutions, the BBC Head of Copyright finally had to write to Lomax, drawing his attention 'to the section 4.3 of the Canadian Copyright Act of 1921'.⁷² Lomax replied from the Hotel Nueva York in Madrid:

For the first time students of music and culture will have a good idea of how men have sung in every quarter of the globe, and most important, ordinary listeners everywhere will get acquainted with the peoples of the world in terms of the most understandable of the arts. Folk music can thus help to build for peace. Perhaps you will feel this explanation is unnecessary, but actually this is what is involved in the matter under discussion rather than section 4.3 of the Canadian copyright act of 1921.⁷³

Ultimately, Lomax was forced to back down, and the CBC recordings were removed from the *Canada* album. This clash between what Fred Myers terms regimes of value – in this instance between a utopian vision of the dissemination of the world's musics and the legal protection of cultures, voices, and identities; more broadly of the contestations over culture as it

⁷¹ Sidney Newman letter to Alan Lomax, 25/10/1951. ALC 04.02.12 (2/3) – British Isles—Research Notes—Correspondence

⁷² M. Candler letter to Alan Lomax, 12/8/1952. BBC WAC R46/309/3 – Rec. Gen. Alan Lomax, File 3A – 1952

⁷³ Alan Lomax letter to M. Candler, 15/8/1952. BBC WAC R46/309/3 – Rec. Gen. Alan Lomax, File 3A – 1952

takes on new forms of materiality – has become an increasingly prevalent aspect of world music production and politics.⁷⁴

It also reveals two further properties of the *World Library*: firstly, that in addition to aesthetics and technology, the heterogeneous networks through which the anthology came to be are also legal, with national copyright law enacting an agency of its own in international cultural production; second, that the singers and performers – whose voices and bodies are the source of such cultural struggles – so easily slip through the network, are represented but not consulted, are adopted and adapted through complex collector-institution arrangements, and become part of the transnational traffic in culture, with the slightest leakiness in copyright protection leading to entirely unpredictable reorganisations and recontextualisations.⁷⁵

At the same time, there is a risk of underplaying the agency of the performers; many of those that Lomax recorded in Scotland seemed happy with the prospect of dissemination and recognition. Elizabeth Barclay of Shetland wrote to Lomax to say 'it gives me great pleasure to think that I was able to contribute to your album and so help make Scottish folksongs better known'; Rachel MacLeod of Barra wrote that her friends Mary Gillies and Mary Johnston were 'delighted that they are about "to come into their own at long last". Many a song they have given to song gleaners, now they are about to get honourable mention—thanks to you Mr Lomax'; Calum Johnston expressed his good wishes, writing 'if, by these songs which I learnt in my youth, I can contribute a little towards giving pleasure to others then I am quite happy'; and Kate Nicolson of South Uist replied to a Lomax letter, 'I am glad you enjoyed your trip to the highlands so well. I must say we were only too pleased to be of any use to your recording'.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Fred Myers, 'Some Properties of Art and Culture: Ontologies of the Image and Economics of Exchange' in *Materiality*, ed. Daniel Miller (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 89; Stokes, 'On Musical Cosmopolitanism', 1-3

⁷⁵ An excellent example of these processes is given in Steven Feld and Annemette Kirkegaard, 'Entangled Complicities in the Prehistory of "World Music": Poul Rovsing Olsen and Jean Jenkins Encounter Brian Eno and David Byrne in the Bush of Ghosts' *Popular Musicology Online*, 4 (2010), <http://www.popular-musicology-online.com/issues/04/feld.html>

⁷⁶ Elizabeth Barclay letter to Alan Lomax, 20/11/1951. ALC 04.02.12 (2/3), British Isles – Research Notes – Correspondence; Rachel MacLeod letter to Alan Lomax, 21/8/1951. ALC 04.02.12 (3/3), British Isles – Transcripts, Research Notes,

Not much of the labour that was built into the *World Library*'s production was factored into reviews upon its release. Instead it was heralded as a faithful document of traditional musics, with reviewer Howard LaFay asserting that 'this monumental project was undertaken in the nick of time ... fortunately for us and for succeeding generations, the *World Library* reflects the full, mellow beauty of the sunset of this musical tradition'.⁷⁷ The grouping that Lomax and his collaborators performed is re-performed, and strengthened in the process. The *World Library* as entextualisation of mid-century cultural anxiety is contextualised back into public discourse, with reviews helping to supervise its reception. Folk and primitive musics are mapped against a familiar anti-group: pop. And the sound of the recordings, in particular, is championed. Alan Merriam and Charles Haywood, in their review of the *World Library*, praised it as a 'major contribution to the study of folk music':

This, in large measure, is due to the fact that *all* the material was recorded 'in the field'. There is no impression of the recording studio here, no contrivances with mikes, or setting up of proper balances. There is a pervading feeling of truth—this is how the folk sings, dances, or plays.⁷⁸

Such affirmations of truth and the notion of fidelity in sound reproduction are problematic. Nevertheless, this argument – that field recordings are the truthful counterpart to the artifice of the studio – has proven to be quite persistent, challenging a pair of (false) dichotomies, highlighted by Frith and Lastra, that have dominated perceptions of sound recording: first, that live music equates to natural communication and truthfulness, while recorded music is artificial, to be treated with suspicion; second, that recorded sound is either 'phonographic' – sonically faithful in its reproduction of reality – or

Correspondence; Calum Johnston letter to Alan Lomax, 10/10/1951. ALC 04.02.18, Field Work – British Isles – Receipts; Kate Nicolson letter to Alan Lomax, undated ca. late 1951. ALC 04.02.18, Field Work – British Isles – Receipts

⁷⁷ Howard LaFay, 'To the Fourteen Corners of the World with Alan Lomax', *High Fidelity* (March 1955), 57-58

⁷⁸ Haywood and Merriam, 'Folk and Primitive Music', 86

'telephonic'—privileging intelligibility and particular aspects of sound at the expense of others.⁷⁹ What must be considered in the case of the *World Library*, of field recording, of folk music, and of the history of ethnomusicology, is how technologies are wilfully made to vanish in maintenance of a discourse of sonic transparency.⁸⁰

The Art of Field Production

Mitch Miller misread the script a little. Miller would ordinarily be positioned outside the network of folk music history: contributing significantly to music production techniques, crafting an echo chamber out of a toilet and claiming to make the first multitrack recording in 1949; something of a giant of the music industry in the twentieth century. Speaking as Head of A&R at Columbia, he credited Lomax, rather than the music he had gathered, as being 'an authentic' in an interview for a *World Library* review in *Newsweek*. He continued: 'for Lomax, feeling and emotional delivery are more important than rough edges on the voice. In fact, the rough edges are part of the attractiveness of the style'.⁸¹ In some respects, Miller's assertion is a pre-echo of Barthes's concept of the grain of the voice, calling forth again those ancient timbres discussed in Chapter Three. The point that neither Miller nor Barthes make, which has been corrected since, is that for the grain of the voice to be audible beyond a finite space and time, a host of technologies are required.⁸²

For Paul Théberge, writing on the sound of music, the grain of the voice is revealed with uncommon closeness thanks to the microphone. Moreover, it

⁷⁹ Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: Evaluating Popular Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 25-26; Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 19-21; James Lastra, *Sound Technology and American Cinema: Perception, Representation, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 138

⁸⁰ Lomax's work has its own particular take on ethnomusicology's mid-century tensions: between fieldwork as salvage and as the study of music in culture; between technology as key fieldwork protagonist and as vanishing mediator. The monumentality of the *World Library* comes in part through the way it materialises this tension, containing both sides of the ethnomusicological shift from text to context through the transatlantic circumstances of its production

⁸¹ Mitch Miller, *Newsweek*, 14 April 1958; Marmorstein, *The Label*, 183-4; Timothy Taylor, *The Sounds of Capitalism: Advertising, Music, and the Conquest of Culture* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 111

⁸² Frith, *Performing Rites*, 187-8; Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology has Changed Music*, 2nd edn (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010), 44

was privileged and made voluptuous as a result of sound entering a new stage of rationalisation in the 1950s, with the advent of recording studio practices of isolation, selective emphasis (reverb, equalisation, compression, etc.), and spatial placement in the mix.⁸³ Haywood and Merriam's review of the *World Library*, which credits field recordings as being truthful on the grounds that they were made outside of studios, must therefore be considered against what else was happening in music – specifically music production – at the time. The *World Library* was released in 1955. 'Rock Around the Clock' had just stormed to the top of the UK charts.

The implications of thinking synchronically across music worlds – or cultural pluralism, as discussed by David Clarke – should thus be extended to thinking across discourses and aesthetics of record production. Lomax's Magne recorder can be slotted in alongside Elvis and Darmstadt in Clarke's formulation of significant mid-fifties musical phenomena that occurred concurrently but are usually kept apart in historiography, 'normally kept in their safely separate historical containers, now rearticulated in a potentially volatile chain of meaning'.⁸⁴ Richard Peterson's question, 'Why 1955?' – directed toward the advent of rock music – can also be asked of the *World Library*: why then, and with what consequences?⁸⁵

A complex and variegated network of institutional labour and limit, recording technology, sonic aesthetics, copyright law, competition, archival preservation and cooperation, contingent and conditional processes of grouping and translation, mediality—for the field recordings housed in the *World Library* to make the cut, each of these phenomena had first to be compressed into their audible exteriors. Lomax and his fellow anthologists

⁸³ Paul Théberge, 'The "Sound" of Music: Technological Rationalisation and the Production of Popular Music', *new formations*, 8 (1989), 103; Simon Frith, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock & Roll* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), 164. It is worth noting that sound production and the grain of the voice did not bypass folk music discourse in the 1950s; a 1953 review of Esme Lewis's (who wrote to Lomax about Welsh music) HMV album, *Welsh Folk Songs*, stated 'she has the gift of projecting her whole self into her songs, and the recording engineers would have obtained a far more intimate quality, had Miss Lewis been nearer to the microphone'. *English Dance and Song*, XVII: 4 (1953), 130-31

⁸⁴ David Clarke, 'Elvis and Darmstadt, or: Twentieth-Century Music and the Politics of Cultural Pluralism', *Twentieth-Century Music* 4: 1 (2007), 8

⁸⁵ Richard Peterson, 'Why 1955? Explaining the Advent of Rock Music', *Popular Music*, 9: 1 (1990), 97-116

worked to convert the oral into the aural, sounding some nations, but not others, on the basis of their abilities to perform this compression and conversion.

And were the voices on the *World Library* not voluptuous? Not only did Lomax stress 'good acoustic quality' in his approach letters to archivists, he also later revealed to Kennedy that he employed the same production techniques and rationalised sonic approach as developed by those crafting sound in studios: 'in all my albums I have helped the records a lot with the filter bank, the echo chamber, and I've also had a good engineer, who knew about making master tapes for records, socking up all the gain that he could, but careful not to sock on too much. It's a specialised job'.⁸⁶ (Kennedy, meanwhile, was conscious of the sonic space of recording locations, using gym mats 'to deaden the echo' in halls, while working for the BBC in 1952.⁸⁷)

This embrace of the latest technologies was typical for Lomax, but these methods and production practices also serve to complicate the idea of a clean dichotomy of studio and field production. Not that all recordings are the same; but they may be more alike than we think. Both recordist and recording technology must be considered together – neither solely determines the form of a recording – and placed into the complex webs of relationships that created the recording scenario in the first place. The ontology of field recordings is thrown open to question by such practices: a question that can only be answered by tracing the specificities of field recording projects, and probing the institutions that commission them.⁸⁸ In any case, Haywood and Merriam's affirmation – 'this is how the folk sings, dances, or plays' – serves to

⁸⁶ Alan Lomax letter to Valentine Britten, 12/10/1950. BBC WAC R46/309/2 – Rec. Gen. Alan Lomax, File 2: 1947-51; Alan Lomax letter to Peter Kennedy, undated ca. late 1958-early 1959. BL PK Box 12 – Alan Lomax Letters. Evan Eisenberg writes that stepping up the use of studio techniques is one way to make a recording feel more 'alive'—Eisenberg, *The Recording Angel: Music, Records and Culture from Aristotle to Zappa* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 92

⁸⁷ Peter Kennedy report to Marie Slocombe, 13/10/1952. BL PK Box 16 – BBC Reports

⁸⁸ On institutions, see Born, 'The Social and the Aesthetic', 190. A proper ontology of field recordings is beyond the scope of this thesis, but my point is that field recordings shared time, technology, technique, sonic space with patterns in sound recording generally, rather than existing as a separate history. This isn't to say that the application of post-production techniques renders a Lomax recording indistinct from an Elvis recording; uses of technology are never predetermined and can be put to any number of aesthetic or political purposes

elide materiality, to make technology, mediality, and production technique disappear, and seems more like an exercise in performativity, an investment in the grouping, than an accurate description of the cultural production etched into the grooves of the discs.

Magnetic tape was a boon: 'gone the needle rasp of the aluminium disc; gone the worry with the chip and delicate surface of the acetates. Here was a quiet sound track with better fidelity than I had imagined ever possible; and a machine that virtually ran itself, so that I could give my full attention to the musicians'.⁸⁹ Lomax frequently emphasised the agency of machines in his writing, folding recordist and recording device into one.⁹⁰ He also had a tendency to posit himself and his technologies as being 'primitive', in an effort to align himself with those whose music he sought and to gloss over the division of sonic labour involved in his work.⁹¹ This holds for the *World Library*. Lomax wrote of cutting and editing tape as 'a job like weaving', linking new technologies with traditional arts in a direct material genealogy.⁹²

But magnetic tape also afforded increased possibilities for the recombination and suture of sounds, undermining temporal continuity in the process.⁹³ It was, in other words, modern. Lomax wrote of spending eight to ten hours a day cutting tape when preparing the *England and Ireland* albums. ('I cut tape all day, very happily'.⁹⁴) Lomax's tape weaving was hemmed in, however, by another new technology: the Long-Playing record, developed by Columbia and introduced to the market in 1948. And when he writes in the same diary entry, 'I'm almost done—about three or four minutes over and about to make final decisions', the determining agency of format looms over the *World Library*.

⁸⁹ Lomax, 'Saga of a Folksong Hunter' (1960), in *Selected Writings*, 178

⁹⁰ In an article on Lomax's evolving relations with communication technologies, Henry Adam Svec presents a quartet of quotes in which Lomax does exactly this, highlighting it as a habit. Svec, 'Folk Media: Alan Lomax's Deep Digitality', *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 38 (2013), 232-3

⁹¹ Svec, 'Folk Media', 234

⁹² ALC 07.03.22 – Diary, 1951

⁹³ Théberge, 'The "Sound" of Music', 105; Stanyek and Piekut, 'Deadness', 19

⁹⁴ ALC 07.03.22 – Diary, 1951

This was a project not merely made possible by, but indeed made *for* the LP. Lomax wrote of the format as 'a near perfect means for publishing a folk song collection ... one LP encompasses as much folk music as a normal printed monograph and presents the vital reality of an exotic song style as written notation never can'.⁹⁵ Format governs the dimensions of the collection, however, and exactly how much 'vital reality' can fit onto a release is pre-determined, again undermining the notion of reality on record.

To be more specific, in attempting to write a nation onto two sides of a microgroove disc, Lomax chose to whittle down tracks of different styles and times and cultures to often little more than thirty seconds of sound. JoAnne Mancini terms this use of the LP format 'anthological modernism', in which technology was used to 'convert dozens of songs into a visionary whole that did not itself resemble a commercial product but rather a collection of sacred texts'.⁹⁶ And I run with the idea of anthological modernism here: the *World Library*, with its complex relationships with mass media, definition of nation states through international cultural production, and its splitting and reordering of time by assembling supposed survivals of pre-modernity on modern materials can be heard precisely this way.

Presenting music in fragments has its own implications. Charles Seeger commented in his review of the *World Library* that 'the walls between tracks break more easily than they should'.⁹⁷ Howard Lafay similarly remarked that 'excerpts are fragmentary to the point of near-obliteration'.⁹⁸ Maybe, then, the *World Library* can be heard as a piece of tape music, not completely unlike new kinds of composition based on cutting, splicing, and manipulating tape that were gaining ground in art music at the same time. There are some connections here. While plotting the *World Library* from Paris, Lomax had written to D.G. Bridson at the BBC with a plan to record 'sounds and music of

⁹⁵ Lomax, 'Saga of a Folksong Hunter' (1960), in *Selected Writings*, 178

⁹⁶ J.M. Mancini, "'Messin' with the Furniture Man": Early Country Music, Regional Culture, and the Search for an Anthological Modernism', *American Literary History*, 16: 2 (2004), 223. Reference to anthologies when discussing this music and this period brings to mind Harry Smith, and Mancini's analysis is indeed focused equally on Lomax, Smith, and Ruth Crawford Seeger. Despite the many overlaps between Lomax and Smith's work, I found no correspondence between the two, or even any mention of Smith in the Alan Lomax Collection during my time there

⁹⁷ Seeger, 'Columbia World Library', 113

⁹⁸ Lafay, 'To the Fourteen Corners of the World', 58

the great cities of the world at night – the entertainment life – the theatres, etc. I'm working out a plan for Paris ... I'd like to work hard on any or all of the projects I have described'.⁹⁹ Lomax went to Italy to scope out recordings in September 1953, exactly the time that Luciano Berio and Bruno Maderna were composing their *Ritratto di città* ('Portrait of a City')—a collage of city sounds in tape.¹⁰⁰

There's nothing to say that these projects were actually connected, or that Lomax even knew of Berio and Maderna. But Lomax was a tape cutter, and the *World Library* makes for a dizzying listen. It uses sound recording and editing and rhythm to produce place. Each album can be heard as an aesthetic object as well as an ethnographic document. The *World Library* sits at the intersection of modernist art and ethnography. Despite the discourse of science that permeated its production, the anthology perhaps belongs within the history of ethnological and surrealist collaborations. Picasso at the Trocadéro, Lévi-Strauss in wartime New York—the category of 'primitive art' emerged at the meeting point of modernist aesthetics and global culture collecting.¹⁰¹ Clifford writes: 'Modern practices of art and culture collecting, scientific and avant-garde, have situated themselves at the end of a global history. They have occupied a place – apocalyptic, progressive, revolutionary, or tragic – from which to gather the valued inheritances of Man'.¹⁰² This describes Lomax, with his talk of having documented 'the sound of mankind', perfectly.

The LP has been interpreted as a pedagogical format, affording listeners more time to become familiar with new musics, to allow 'performer identities to assume coherence across a significant body of vocal performances'.¹⁰³ Fragmentation, by contrast, limits the coherence of performer identity, even

⁹⁹ Alan Lomax letter to D.G. Bridson, 25/10/1950. BBC WAC R46/309/2 – Rec. Gen. Alan Lomax File 2: 1947-51

¹⁰⁰ Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music: Music in the Late Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 193

¹⁰¹ Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 228, 236-44. André Schaeffner, who co-produced the *French Africa* volume of the *World Library*, and who developed a musical instrument classification system in the 1930s, had previously worked with Georges Bataille to produce the surrealist journal *Documents* in 1929-30

¹⁰² Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 244

¹⁰³ Will Straw, 'Music and Material Culture' in *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd edn, ed. Clayton, Herbert, and Middleton (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 233-4. See also Marmorstein, *The Label*, 231

stylistic identity, and the most coherent identity to emerge is that of the anthologist. The *World Library* is not Lomax *presenting* the musics he and others collated, not even *representing*, but *becoming* the musics, in an act of what Bourdieu has written of as transubstantiation. Here, 'the representative receives from the group the power of creating the group ... he raises those whom he represents out of their existence as separate individuals, enabling them to act and speak through him as a single person ... [and] acts upon the group through the magic of the slogan', in this case *Folk and Primitive Music*, and the nation or region in question.¹⁰⁴ Nations emerge and are constructed from fragments, energetically and rhizophonically, by anthologists in temporary, yet monumental, aural configurations.¹⁰⁵

Museum of Voice

Transubstantiation is linked to terminology. Lomax extended the language of collecting, referring to himself – as his father had done before him – as a 'ballad hunter'. This has profound implications for the thingness of the music recorded and for questions of ownership also. For Susan Pearce, 'hunting is, to collectors, a helpful analogy, promoting ideas of cunning, stealth, patience, prowess, competition and ultimate success with the acquisition carried home in triumph'.¹⁰⁶ It follows that the *World Library* is a collection – stuffed full of trophy recordings – which appears not so much as a library but more like a museum. This final section explores the anthology as a museum of voice.

Museums – characterised by Myers as playing fields of power struggles – are connected at root to culture collecting, and, by extension, cultural politics.¹⁰⁷ And anthropologists have led the way in revealing the ways in which these connections are concealed by new logics of exhibition: for Myers, 'it requires denying or repressing the actual history of power, relationships, and commerce that resulted in collecting the objects in the first place'; while for Clifford, drawing on Susan Stewart, museums 'create the illusion of adequate

¹⁰⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 248

¹⁰⁵ Stanyek and Piekut, 'Deadness', 19

¹⁰⁶ Susan Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1995), 183-84

¹⁰⁷ Myers, 'Primitivism', 269

representation of a world by first cutting objects out of specific contexts and making them “stand for” abstract wholes’; finally, ‘historical relations of power in the work of acquisition are occulted’, and ‘the time and order of the collection erase the concrete social labour of its making’.¹⁰⁸ These politics are arguably shot through the entire history of ethnographic field recording, but seem particularly pertinent to a project like the *World Library*: with its repression, or compression, of history; its abstract wholes in the form of nations; its erased social (and material and sonic) labour.

As Robert Fink details, the LP facilitated new ways of listening in the 1950s. Coupled with the record changer, the new format afforded ‘hours of uninterrupted listening pleasure’ previously unavailable.¹⁰⁹ Musics from other times and places became popular in unexpected ways. And the goal – which often differed from the reality – was ‘deeper engagement’ with music.¹¹⁰ Lomax, seemingly not thinking that highly of the musicians he was recording, wrote of mid-century as ‘the period of the phonograph or the age of the golden ear, when, for a time, a passionate aural curiosity overshadowed the ability to create music’.¹¹¹ This focus on listening was echoed in the popular press, which positioned the *World Library* as a collector’s item: ‘For anyone whose interest in music is comprehensive, *The Columbia World Library of Folk and Primitive Music* is very close to a must’.¹¹²

To the listener, the *World Library* was presented as a serious experience. Voices were preserved and presented for attention, contemplation, and appreciation. The same review claims that ‘these fourteen records offer more than a musical tour of the world: they offer a penetration into the living hearts of our fellow men’.¹¹³ Moreover, the *World Library* was released on Columbia’s Masterworks label—the company’s vehicle for art music and the driving force

¹⁰⁸ Myers, ‘Primitivism’, 273; Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 219–20

¹⁰⁹ Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves: American Minimal Music as Cultural Practice* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 175

¹¹⁰ Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, 176

¹¹¹ Lomax, ‘Saga of a Folksong Hunter’ (1960), in *Selected Writings*, 173

¹¹² Lafay, ‘To the Fourteen Corners of the World’, 58

¹¹³ Lafay, ‘To the Fourteen Corners of the World’, 58

behind the development of the LP. Field recordings, then, were *serious music*.¹¹⁴

Nicholas Cook writes of records as 'domestic *gesamtkunstwerk*', wherein music is 'literally sandwiched between text and image'.¹¹⁵ In terms of what Cook terms the 'semiotics of packaging', the sleeves of the *World Library* speak of research, of science. This was not only typical of mid-century ethnomusicological discourse, it was also the plan: the *World Library* was marketed as being 'the first systematic mapping of the folk and oral musical tradition of humanity'.¹¹⁶ Serious music. Especially compared to other albums released by Columbia – not on its Masterworks imprint – in the same period (Figure 5.2). The *World Library* marked the beginning of Lomax's career as an aspiring scientist: 'I feel sure I have discovered a really workable methodology for the science of musical-ethnology. I have written a long paper about this; my first paper in folksong, because I never felt there was anything worth writing about'.¹¹⁷ This anthology was not a tourist experience, but a museum of voice.

¹¹⁴ Taruskin writes of the word *serious* as 'an invidious standard and an enforcer of conformity' in musical contexts—Taruskin, *Music in the Late Twentieth Century*, 15

¹¹⁵ Nicholas Cook, 'The Domestic *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or Record Sleeves and Reception' in *Composition—Performance—Reception: Studies in the Creative Process in Music*, ed. Wyndham Thomas (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 105

¹¹⁶ *World Library* record sleeves, Columbia SL-204 – KL 5174

¹¹⁷ Alan Lomax letter to Charles Seeger, 22/8/1954. ALC 23.06.05 (2/17) – Charles Seeger Correspondence



Figure 5.2: LP covers: *Columbia World Library of Folk and Primitive Music, Vol. IV: France* (1955); Michel Legrand and his Orchestra, *I Love Paris*, (1954)

But what are the politics of magnetic tape? Of cutting, fragmenting, splicing, pasting, recombining, suturing, sequencing, representing?¹¹⁸ It may seem on first listen that hearing the sounds of recorded voices is hearing people speak for themselves, but what of the communication that remains on the cutting room floor? What happens to communication when the listener presses *stop*? What does it mean that Stanley Slade is heard internationally as a voice of English music, but only in a recording scenario he disliked and agitated against at the end of his life? His deadness is potent, but his agency is ultimately tethered to the logic of the collection, leaving Slade with little control over which bits of his voice are enrolled in sonic presents and futures.¹¹⁹

The *World Library*, heralded by Lomax on the sleeve of each record as a pure reflection of a techno-cultural utopia – ‘in a thin stack of records one may carry about in two hands, the profoundest and most communicative of the arts will be documented. Vox humana!’¹²⁰ – is more accurately the work of the sonic bricoleur. Developing Lévi-Strauss’s concept, depicting Lomax as sonic bricoleur adds nuance to the notion of ‘the man who recorded the world’, in specific consideration of his work in Britain. The *bricoleur*, for Lévi-Strauss, is one who creates from whatever is at hand, taking from the world’s finite and heterogeneous material culture, repurposing and recontextualising it for their specific project.¹²¹

In retracing the *World Library*, Lomax’s labour and Lévi-Strauss’s design bear uncanny similarity:

¹¹⁸ These questions are fairly straightforward extensions of Wiebe Bijker’s still-relevant proposition: ‘how do power relations materialise in artefacts? Bijker, *Of Bicycles, Bakelites, and Bulbs: Toward a Theory of Sociotechnical Change* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 4

¹¹⁹ Stanyek and Piekut, ‘Deadness’, 18

¹²⁰ It is interesting to note the similarities between Lomax’s statement and the original marketing for the LP: Marmorstein reveals how Columbia had a photograph of Peter Goldmark – who took most of the credit for the format’s creation – published in *Life* magazine, cradling an armful of LPs, ‘the musical equivalent of the eight-foot tower of 78s stacked next to him’. Marmorstein, *The Label*, 166. Clearly, portability was already part of the techno-cultural ideal of music that has since found its manifestation in the Walkman, Minidisc, MP3 player, and mobile phone

¹²¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, trans. Weidenfeld and Nicolson (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), 17. Lomax described Lévi-Strauss as ‘stuffed and intelligent’, and ‘the coldest fellow in the world’ when they met in Paris in 1951—ALC 07.03.21, 1950 – Paris, etc.

Consider him at work and excited by his project. His first practical step is retrospective. He has to turn back to an already existent set made up of tools and materials, to consider and reconsider what it contains and, finally and above all, to engage in a dialogue with it and, before choosing between them, to index the possible answers which the whole set can offer to his problem.¹²²

Lomax as sonic bricoleur, with his Magne recorder as audio suction pump, took precisely these actions, dubbing whatever extant recordings were available to him – even some that strictly were not available to him – and engaging in dialogue with them. The field recordings he made himself were to supplement those he had copied from elsewhere, providing material for his own broadcasting and thickening out the *World Library*—a kind of top-up fieldwork for the exhibitions in his museum of voice. Then, it was a case of spooling out tape to embody nations, entextualising cultural politics onto vinyl, rendering his take on tradition exoteric, carving out sonic space in Europe's postwar aural public sphere.

Conclusion

Lomax returned to the United States in 1958, having spent eight years – much longer than he planned to – in Europe. During this time, he drew upon, worked within, and contributed a good deal to nascent European ethnomusicology. His main endeavour was a piece of international phonography, the *World Library*, which was released in 1955. The kinds of national phonography detailed in each of the previous chapters served as a resource for the production of this anthology.

The project marked the beginning of the rest of Lomax's career. It saw Lomax beginning to move away from the concept of the nation as the best way to understand folk music: 'according to the musical map which is emerging, we seem to be linked across national boundaries, across thousands of miles of land and sea and across millennia, in a number of

¹²² Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 18

extremely old musical families'.¹²³ These ideas would develop into Lomax's theory of cantometrics—the project that Lomax believed was his main contribution to scholarship but that saw him frozen out of the academy and frozen in time as a comparativist.

With the *World Library*, however, the nation remained the unit of circulation. Each LP claimed to embody national music, and collectively they were hailed as capturing the feeling of nationness in sound. Having travelled through abstract ideas of national culture, into sound archives and onto the radio, the logics of national phonography were now available for purchase—entering into a system of objects as world music. Listeners could now own records simply titled *England* and *Scotland*. The work of national phonography was complete.

¹²³ *World Library* record sleeves, Columbia SL-204 – KL-5174

Chapter 6

Archival Silence

Introduction

Jump ahead sixty years, to the widespread digitisation and online dissemination of the field recordings discussed so far, alongside thousands more. At the same time jump back to the start of this thesis, to Martin Stokes's description of recordings as 'energetic and conversational creatures, alive to us in time and in space'.¹ This chapter listens to the digitisation and circulation of historical field recordings, asking a string of interrelated questions: What are these recordings saying to us? What are we hearing as we listen to them? What are we not hearing? What do online sound archives tell us about the sonic and musical past?

As field recordings produced in the twentieth century are rehoused in new online listening forums, it's a good time to ask what these sounds and silences represent. Having considered the labours that went into the production of field recordings, we can now turn to the labour that recordings perform in the present. I attempt to do this by first placing current digitisation practices within a broader archival turn within ethnomusicology, before developing a theory of recordings as compressed performances to take account of the ways in which multiple agencies continue to be enacted through playback. I then consider how changes in format affect the sonic aesthetics and reception of recordings, and listen to how archival silences built into collections inform how the nation sounds historically as we listen back. This chapter concludes with a discussion of field recordings and sound archives as forms of heritage, asking whose nation is heard in national phonography.

¹ Martin Stokes, *The Republic of Love: Cultural Intimacy in Turkish Popular Music* (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 8

The Archival Turn

Despite the importance of Derrida's intervention into conceptualisations of the archive, an archival turn with a longer history can be traced across the humanities. Ann Laura Stoler, for instance, argues that such a turn has 'a wider arc and a longer durée' than one which posits Derrida as a starting point.² This turn has been marked by a shift from archive-as-source to archive-as-subject, with the result that archives can be read in a growing number of ways.³ Although not explicitly framed as such, a similar shift has been taking place in ethnomusicology—a turn characterised by a *return* to archival materials, as resource, legacy, renewal, critique.

An increasing number of research projects make use of archival recordings as ethnomusicologists seek to engage with what Caroline Bithell calls 'the past in music': exploring 'the ways in which echoes and legacies from the past can still be heard in the present and to consider the extent to which musical practices in the present are shaped not only by past experience but also by ideas, feelings and beliefs about the past'.⁴ This has been accompanied by calls for fieldworkers to engage more actively with the process of depositing recordings in archives, to secure a future for the musical present. It has taken but a few short years to move from a situation – to borrow from the work of Janet Topp Fargion – in which recordings were largely made for personal research purposes to a situation in which 'we are all archivists now'.⁵ The guiding principles behind these moves are efforts to build a more equitable discipline, fostering sustainable musical practices, coupled with attempts to de-colonise the discipline from its own colonial history.⁶

² Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 44. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996)

³ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 44-45

⁴ Caroline Bithell, 'The Past in Music: Introduction', *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 15:1 (2006), 4

⁵ Janet Topp Fargion, "'For My Own Research Purposes": Examining Ethnomusicology Field Methods for a Sustainable Future', *The World of Music*, 51:1 (2009), 75-93. Carolyn Landau and Janet Topp Fargion, 'We're all Archivists Now', *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 21:2 (2012), 125-40

⁶ Aaron Fox, 'Repatriation as Reanimation through Reciprocity' in *The Cambridge History of World Music*, ed. Philip Bohlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

The concept of repatriation – of returning materials to their place of origin – has been given top billing in much of ethnomusicology's archival turn. It has focused on the positives of archival materials, of which there are many, and ethnomusicologists have taken up the role of 'culture broker' in engagements between archives and the communities recorded.⁷ Anthony Seeger and Shubha Chaudhuri highlight how the communities studied by ethnomusicologists have tended to be more interested in the recordings made as part of the study process than the publications into which they fed.⁸ Recordings thus have a much larger potential audience than originally conceived, and have 'made it possible for communities to renew traditions that were long abandoned and nearly forgotten', as well as being used as evidence in court cases over property and land titles.⁹

Repatriation of recordings has a history that reaches back to 1979, when the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress launched its Federal Cylinder Project, returning recordings made during the early history of sound reproduction of American Indian music and spoken word to the communities where they were made.¹⁰ Yet the possibilities of these practices have been greatly expanded with what Bertram Lyons calls the 'archival age of mass digitisation'.¹¹ Significant within these developments is the 'indirect delivery' of recordings through websites. And among the effects of digitisation, for Lyons, has been a shift in focus away from the carrier of content towards the content itself: no longer is a wax cylinder or reel of tape the object of attention; a .wav file doesn't seem to generate the same level of excitement in and of itself.¹²

2013), 522-54. See also the contributions to Henry Stobart ed., *The New (Ethno)Musicologies* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008)

⁷ Landau and Topp Fargion, 'We're all Archivists Now', 129

⁸ Anthony Seeger and Shubha Chaudhuri, 'Archives and the Future' in *Archives for the Future: Global Perspectives on Audiovisual Archives in the 21st Century*, ed. Seeger and Chaudhuri (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2004), 4

⁹ Seeger and Chaudhuri, 'Archives and the Future', 4

¹⁰ Judith Gray, 'Returning Music to the Makers: The Library of Congress, American Indians, and the Federal Cylinder Project', *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, 20: 4 (1996). Online at: <http://www.culturalsurvival.org/ourpublications/csq/article/returning-music-makers-the-library-congress-american-indians-and-federal>

¹¹ Bertram Lyons, 'Repatriation and Digital Cultural Heritage', *Indian Folklife*, 37 (2011), unpaginated

¹² Lyons, 'Repatriation and Digital Cultural Heritage'

Built into repatriation projects is a new willingness to relinquish intellectual, as well as physical, control of archive materials, to let others determine their meaning, and to welcome new interpretations.¹³ In turn, this is tied to a sense of correcting history. Field recordings from the late nineteenth through much of the twentieth century were made in colonial contexts or were at least often imbued with a primitivising impulse. Don Niles highlights the mutual benefits of repatriation: 'Successful return of such items can and should be celebrated as public events and given media coverage ... such public relations exercises are invaluable to both the giving and receiving countries'.¹⁴ It is difficult to argue with this, although lurking within the concept of repatriation is the sense that cultures still need the help of outsiders to continue traditional practices, as well as an underestimation of the abilities of people to document their own heritage, and an implicit desire to shape culture even when encouraging new interpretations.

Nonetheless, repatriation remains an important part of the ethnomusicological present, and a key component of ongoing efforts to make fieldwork a reciprocal endeavour.¹⁵ Included in the concept is the necessity of getting recordings to people wherever they are, addressing the fact that communities are not geographically static, but are often what Robert Lancefield calls 'translocated'.¹⁶ But are the ethics and intentions of repatriation complicated when these activities are performed within, rather than across, nations?

In Britain, the materials produced as part of the postwar recording moment were informed by late colonialism and contained more than a hint of primitivism. It is tempting to agree with Tony Benn's characterisation of Britain as a subject country, colonised by its own elites (although this ultimately has to be rejected as it denies the systematic cruelty meted out in colonial history,

¹³ Lyons, 'Repatriation and Digital Cultural Heritage'

¹⁴ Don Niles, 'Reclaiming the Past: The Value of Recordings to a National Cultural Heritage' in *Archives for the Future*, ed. Seeger and Chaudhuri, 202

¹⁵ Aaron Fox writes that the value of an archival collection could only be discovered and actualised for the future if 'we approached its reconstruction by engaging with the descendants of those who had given their songs, and if we in turn *gave it away again* with humility and generosity and a sense of responsibility to tradition'—Fox, 'Repatriation as Reanimation through Reciprocity', 552

¹⁶ Robert Lancefield, "'Musical Traces" Retraceable Paths: The Repatriation of Recorded Sound', *Journal of Folklore Research*, 35: 1 (1998), 48-53

and turns what is, for some, a very real memory into a political metaphor).¹⁷ So although the two histories of colonialism and national phonography are connected, are parts of the same larger history, the central questions of internal repatriation in this context are less clear. To whom are digitised field recordings in Britain being returned? To which cultural groups do they belong?

The logics of national phonography dictate that the musics in question represent the nation, and thus could be said to belong to all of its members; this is one reason why folk songs have historically been framed as something approximating *people's music*. But national phonography is contingent upon delineating and selecting, staging and silencing parts of the nation. The national society recorded in the 1950s was a construct of the individuals and institutions that took it upon themselves to produce and preserve the nation, artificially purifying repertoires, communities, and cultures in the process. Perhaps, then, instead of asking to whom recordings are being returned, the temporal aspects of circulation outweigh the spatial ones in cases of internal repatriation. Field recordings seemingly contribute to questions of how societies remember, providing information on when the past was, who lived there, and what it sounded like.¹⁸ But to argue, as is often argued, that field recordings offer a window to the past – presenting a clean, clear view of life in Britain at the time of recording – is to gloss over the medialities involved in their production.¹⁹

Which prompts another question: what, even, is being repatriated?

Compressed Performances

One of the themes that has been repeated through the preceding chapters is the idea that the voices we hear on recordings are not the only voices

¹⁷ Tony Benn in Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010[1987]), 62

¹⁸ Bithell, 'The Past in Music', 4-6

¹⁹ This trope will reappear through this chapter, so by way of an example of this kind of discourse: field recordings have been called a 'window to the past' in a crowdfunding video for the website *Tobar an Dualchais* –

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wYNjrwBb4E>; elsewhere, photos taken by Peter Kennedy and uploaded to the British Library facebook page have been commented on with the exact same term applied – <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10151463890972139.528434.8579062138&type=1>

speaking to us as we listen. We're also listening to the phonographers – the producers and their theories and aesthetics – as well as the technologies and institutional practices that have given recordings their material form. In this section I develop an idea that has been building as we've traced the trajectories of recordings from their conception through their being archived and broadcast and to their commercial release into systems of international circulation: field recordings are *compressed performances*, whereby multiple forms of agency are compacted to intensify sonic materiality, whereby the politics of national phonography are re-performed with each playback.

The term is borrowed from Christopher Pinney's ethnographic work on personal photographic archives and picture production in central India.²⁰ In an attempt to overcome the practice of purification that impossibly separates subjects from objects, drawing on Bruno Latour's work on modernity, Pinney calls for an understanding of materiality that engages with the figural excess of objects—the felt intensities that cannot be fully encompassed by language.²¹ Central to Pinney's argument is the notion that objects cannot be fully explained through 'contemporaneity': that is, slicing horizontally across time to uncover the causal factors behind their existence. Rather, 'cultural phenomena may inhabit "the same epoch" and yet may not be others' "contemporaries".²² Detailing the practices of image production in India, where visual artists utilise pictures from various times held in their personal archives to generate new pieces, Pinney reaches a conception of images as 'unpredictable "compressed performances" caught up in recursive trajectories of repetition and pastiche whose dense complexity makes them resistant to any particular moment'.²³

These ideas can be usefully adapted to make sense of field recordings, which can be equally resistant to particular moments. Clearly recordings remain connected to their everyday history; the projects detailed in this thesis were dependent upon technologies and practices particular to the mid-

²⁰ Christopher Pinney, 'Things Happen: Or, From Which Moment Does That Object Come?' in *Materiality*, ed. Daniel Miller (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 257-72

²¹ Pinney, 'Things Happen', 266; Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993)

²² Pinney, 'Things Happen', 265

²³ Pinney, 'Things Happen', 266

twentieth century. But recordings do other things on top of this. They are not *only* connected to this past. The field recording moment was itself resistant to a single temporality, combining modern means of production with survivals theory, building multiple pasts into an historical present. A project like the *World Library* bears resemblance to Pinney's recursive archives: a jumble of materials from various times is gathered together to form a new pastiche. It is at once contemporaneous and un contemporaneous with its 1955 release date, existing both in its time and in a time of its own.

The concept of field recordings as compressed performances is a close relation of the theories of entextualisation and technological delegation discussed in Chapter Two, as well as the idea of the object as assemblage.²⁴ But it can do extra work here due to its musical and sonic resonances. Compression has a pair of meanings in relation to audio production. First, it is a process that removes sounds that are unlikely to be heard in recordings in order to reduce file size and bandwidth.²⁵ Second, compression is used to decrease the dynamic range in a performance (making the quiet bits louder or the loud bits quieter), thus giving a more consistent volume through a track. Both types involve some kind of squashing, and this is an apposite metaphor for reading field recordings.

Squashed into field recordings are all the funders and policy makers, the cultural hopes and anxieties, the institutional and material and sonic labours, the research interests and agendas, the exotericism and mediality, the technological affordances and limits of microphones, preamps, tape machines and batteries; the competition between collectors, the regimes of value, the archives and archons, the national definition and preservation and salvation. Each sticks to the sounds of the voices and bodies of singers and musicians, unfolding (or decompressing) on playback. When we listen to field recordings we do not begin a dialogue but join a debate. Recordings are also

²⁴ Georgina Born defines a musical assemblage as 'a particular combination of mediations (sonic, discursive, visual, artefactual, technological, social, temporal) characteristic of a certain musical culture and historical period'. 'On Musical Mediation: Ontology, Technology and Creativity', *Twentieth-Century Music*, 2: 1 (2005), 8

²⁵ This type of compression, achieved through perceptual coding, is key to the MP3 format. Its history is detailed in Jonathan Sterne's excellent study, *MP3: The Meaning of a Format* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012)

heard to point outwards to things beyond themselves, coming to represent some aspect of 'being there' in history.²⁶ These are the excesses that give field recordings their materiality, carrying over through changes in format. So even though recordings now circulate on USB sticks, CDRs, websites and hard drives – rather than as hefty caches of discs and reels – their materiality remains intact. They have been micromaterialised, not dematerialised; and the figural excess is still there.

In 1986 Anthony Seeger urged ethnomusicologists who make recordings to think of themselves as record producers: 'No archive preserves sounds. What it preserves are *interpretations* of sounds—interpretations made by the people who did the recordings, and their equipment'.²⁷ This is remarkable for the fact that it needed saying at all. It attempts to counter the discourse of objectivity and fieldwork as unproblematic data gathering that abounded through comparative musicology and into ethnomusicology, expressed most famously in Jaap Kunst's assertion on ethnomusicology, technology and science (quoted the introduction to this thesis). Nor does Seeger buy into the marketing spiel that guarantees good recordings with improvements in technology. He continues: 'simply turning on the recorder will produce "high fidelity". But fidelity to what?'²⁸

This all sounds good to me. But by positing that recordists may be better remembered for their recordings than their theories, Seeger insists on a separation between subjects and objects that is a purification.²⁹ Instead, the three-way relationship that Seeger highlights between recordists, their microphones, and the people or things they record – the same relationship that Edward Ives terms a 'trialogue'³⁰ – should be expanded to take account of

²⁶ Jonathan Sterne, 'The Preservation Paradox in Digital Audio' in *Sound Souvenirs: Audio Technologies, Memory and Cultural Practices*, ed. Karin Bijsterveld and José van Dijck (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 63

²⁷ Anthony Seeger, 'The Role of Sound Archives in Ethnomusicology Today', *Ethnomusicology*, 30:2 (1986), 270

²⁸ Seeger, 'The Role of Sound Archives in Ethnomusicology Today', 270

²⁹ Seeger, 'The Role of Sound Archives in Ethnomusicology Today', 267

³⁰ Edward D. Ives, *The Tape-Recorded Interview: A Manual for Fieldworkers in Folklore and Oral History*, 2nd edn (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 39-40. Ives's discussion of the triologue doesn't fully take into account the uneven power relations between the three participants

the ways in which recordists perform their theories in the field. This is where the other half of the term 'compressed performances' comes into play.

Arguing for the act of recording to be considered as a kind of performance brings us back to the role of the record producer—a term much more familiar and frequently employed in relation to popular music. The discourse of objectivity that has attended practices of field recording serves to distance ethnomusicological and folkloric fieldwork from popular music production (and consequently folk musics from popular musics). Yet as we have seen, the dichotomy that places field and studio recordings as completely separate, even opposed, activities is exaggerated, permeable, artificial. Just as record producers in studios employ techniques based on genre conventions, record company expectations, imagined audiences and collaboration with musicians, record producers in the field perform techniques based on similar conventions, external interests, audiences and collaborations. Field recordists in effect construct and operate within mini studios, purpose built – sometimes literally, sometimes figuratively – in the field.

To shift perspective slightly, arguments that hold mass media and recording technology accountable for the marginalisation and precariousness of traditional musics seem to be somewhat misplaced; the fact that I can still listen to Jimmy MacBeath or Margaret Barry or Stanley Slade owes much to their contribution. In other words, those forces traditionally regarded as enemies of tradition have enabled the circumscription and circulation of such musics. Which is not to say that all is well and fair within capitalist economies, only that all recordings exist within them. Some recordings are made directly for projects of commercial dissemination, while others are reactions against mass media. Some are both. Yet all are created within the industrial contexts of production and consumption, and all operate through the music industries, if considered as a plural rather than singular entity.³¹ Recordings of all stripes circulate and can behave like any other modern commodity. Furthermore, the insistence that there were in fact the remnants of a folk culture that existed

³¹ Stephen Cottrell argues that the music industries (plural) encompass ethnomusicology and other sound-producing disciplines of study. 'Ethnomusicology and the Music Industries: An Overview', *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 19: 1 (2010), 3-25

outside of the communicative and administrative workings of society was often negligent to those individuals in question.

Take, for instance, the case of Jimmy MacBeath, writing to Alan Lomax with regard to a MacBeath recording being used in a Lomax BBC broadcast:

I am writing this letter to you asking you if you would kindly let me know do I get any more payment when the recording broadcast is on, on Tuesday night. Because Hamish Henderson told me to write to you about this. And if you would let me know if there is any more money due to me. Because they are bothering me in the Labour Exchange about it.³²

MacBeath at the Labour Exchange presents a different picture of the singer's life, and the role of recordings therein, from the romanticised description of him in a Ewan MacColl radio broadcast as 'the last of the minstrels', or in Lomax's sleeve notes to the *Columbia World Library* as someone who 'rambles the roads of Scotland with his ballads'.³³ Different regimes of value, again. The carefree life of the rambling singer doesn't correlate so well with the person seeking financial recompense for the use of their recorded voice. Lomax's handwriting is scrawled on the letter: 'no more money'.

Not dissimilarly, the singers who frustrated Peter Kennedy in the Scottish Highlands by placing equal value on Child ballads and crooners' songs probably had good reason to do so, probably included them in their repertoire as they were both meaningful, probably did so out of choice rather than, as the collectors often claimed, out of neglect or ignorance. (Personally, I would love to hear Grace Stewart's version of, say, Perry Como's 'Wanted'.³⁴) The point here is that there is little evidence to suggest that the singers and musicians

³² Jimmy MacBeath letter to Alan Lomax, 1/12/1951. ALC 04.02.23 (3/3) – Fieldwork—British Isles

³³ Script to 'Traditional Ballads', written and narrated by Ewan MacColl, recorded on 28/12/1952, in ALC 04.04.06 – BBC Radio Scripts—Ewan MacColl. Columbia SL-209

³⁴ In fairness, there are a few versions of Harry Lauder songs in the School of Scottish Studies sound archive, many sung by Jeannie Robertson and recorded by Hamish Henderson. Robertson also recorded a Jimmie Rodgers song, 'Hobo Bill's Last Ride', about somebody who died from the cold through travelling on the American railroads, that she learnt through oral tradition –

<http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/76753/2>

we hear in field recordings thought of themselves and their music in the same way that the recordists encouraged audiences to think of them.

The production of national music, and the clean separation of folk and pop, is a result of the assumptions and prejudices of recordists and their affiliations compressed into and performed through recordings. Ideas of discrete repertoires and aesthetic hierarchies were imposed by those whose professional legitimacy (and livelihood) depended on them. Often this centred on notions of authenticity. But as Stokes puts it: 'authenticity is not a property of music, musicians and their relations to an audience ... it is instead a discursive trope of great persuasive power'.³⁵ The idea that some musics and musicians are more authentic than others does not *inhere in* music, but is something *attached to* it: through language, visual signifiers, and paratexts of all sorts. Social actors erect boundaries to maintain distinctions between musics – and people – and use terms like 'authenticity' to justify them.³⁶

Conceptualising field recordings as compressed performances – suffused with theory, entextualising ideology, concealing power – is intended to give a sense of the multiple agencies contained within them. Recordings are not the products of objective machines and their neutral operators; they are cultural productions of sound created for specific media projects in specific times and places. In this regard, field recordings constitute a form of what Karin Bijsterveld has discussed as 'staged sound'—constructed encounters that now form part of our mediated cultural heritage.³⁷ They are performances, yielding information about the practices of recording as much as the musics recorded; about the place and time of technology and institutions as much as the sense of place and time we hear on record. And like all recorded performances, they can be re-performed and repeated in different contexts.

Remediation

One of the main venues for listening to field recordings in the twenty-first century is the institutional website or online sound archive. This section

³⁵ Martin Stokes, 'Introduction: Ethnicity, Identity and Music' in *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*, ed. Martin Stokes (Oxford: Berg, 1994), 7

³⁶ Stokes, 'Ethnicity, Identity and Music', 6

³⁷ Karin Bijsterveld, 'Introduction' in *Soundscapes of the Urban Past: Staged Sound as Mediated Cultural Heritage*, ed. Karin Bijsterveld (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013), 14

explores a number of these online archives as sites of remediation, whereby the experience of old media is carried through the transferral into new media. Digitised field recordings from earlier eras occupy interesting sonic space in the musical present. What do field recordings do – what effects do they have – now they have migrated online?

The first thing to say is that they make themselves heard anew. Previously, listening to field recordings involved a trip to a physical archive; or catching the fragments deemed broadcast- or market-ready by archives, radio stations and record labels. As with most things, the Internet has transformed musical drips of circulation into (excuse the pun) a torrent. The School of Scottish Studies, for example, has been formally disseminating material held in its archive since 1971: first through the publication of the journal *Tocher*, presenting transcribed archival materials in an accessible – and affordable – format; closely followed by the *Scottish Tradition* series, initially on LP, now on CD. The website *Tobar an Dualchais* was launched in 2010, housing recordings from the School's archives, as well as those of BBC Scotland and the National Trust for Scotland.³⁸ Instantly more recordings were available for streaming than had been available for purchase over the previous forty years combined.

Likewise with the *World Library*, Lomax wrote to Goddard Lieberman in 1976 to express his disgruntlement that the series of LPs had fallen out of print, claiming it as 'the standard text in most ethnomusicology courses', and that it had 'never been improved upon, and each album is priceless and permanent'.³⁹ (Another clash of regimes of value: Lomax's affirmations rub against the logics of the recording industries, which dictate that most products are not supposed to be, are even designed not to be, permanent; and that everything has a price and is for sale.) In 1998, Rounder Records began to re-release the *World Library* on CD, but these have quickly become unavailable again. Despite their intended monumental status, the recordings selected for the *World Library* have been protean, slippery, elusive; until the

³⁸ <http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/> Tobar an Dualchais translates as 'Kist o Riches' in Scots, and 'Well of Heritage' in English

³⁹ Alan Lomax letter to Goddard Lieberman, 30/3/1976. ALC 13.01.11 (4/15) – CBS Records

inclusion of many of them in the Alan Lomax sound collection on the Association for Cultural Equity website.

In both cases, the circulation of field recordings has been the movement of limited material objects, imbuing the launch of online archives with the feel of an event, of abundance after scarcity. As well as informing the reception of recordings (an issue to which I will return shortly), there are very practical reasons for this sudden plenitude. Succinctly, digitisation is preservation. All formats deteriorate, and the migration of audiovisual materials onto digital formats is as much to do with safeguarding as with dissemination.

As Dietrich Schüller puts it, 'copying to new media is the inescapable fate of all audiovisual holdings ... only the digital domain will allow the subsequent copying of contents without loss over centuries'.⁴⁰ The futures of sound archives depend on digitisation, on the transferral of content to new carriers. Not only do old formats like wax cylinders and shellac discs and magnetic tape deteriorate, they require equipment for playback that is no longer manufactured. Accordingly, an archival paradigm shift has occurred: no longer striving to eternally preserve the original carriers placed in the care of archives, current archival practices aim at the preservation of the contents of those carriers by other means.⁴¹

There are obvious advantages to this, including the affordance of online repatriation; and there are national efforts around the world, as well as cooperative international efforts, to digitise the contents of audiovisual archives. Yet as Schüller also notes, the more modern an audiovisual carrier is, the less permanent it is.⁴² And this is echoed by Sterne, for whom digital formats – unlike their analogue forebears – fall off a cliff from presence to absence.⁴³ Rather than slowly fading and degrading, digital files have a more 'radical threshold of intelligibility', becoming entirely unreadable when damaged.⁴⁴ Moreover, the 'readability' of hard drives depends on software and operating systems that are always changing and competing amongst

⁴⁰ Dietrich Schüller, 'Technology for the Future' in *Archives for the Future*, ed. Seeger and Chaudhuri (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2004), 31

⁴¹ Schüller, 'Technology for the Future', 31

⁴² Schüller, 'Technology for the Future', 38

⁴³ Sterne, 'The Preservation Paradox', 64

⁴⁴ Sterne, 'The Preservation Paradox', 64

themselves. The digital, if anything, speeds up the ephemerality of recorded sound.

At the same time, the digitisation and online dissemination of historical field recordings offers a new listening experience. For Sterne, changes in format occasion 'a different relationship between listener and recording'; while for Stephen Cottrell, 'the artefacts through which music is mediated ... help to define those meanings we construe upon the music itself'.⁴⁵ This kind of format theory is useful as it takes account of how we encounter recorded sound in the world – through formats: the feel and experience of a medium – and how this inflects and informs our interpretations of those sounds (even though Cottrell springs an ontological trap by referring to 'the music itself' as something existing autonomously from these boxes and bytes).⁴⁶

With the digitisation and online circulation of field recordings, however, we are listening to two formats at once, listening to tape machines via digital interfaces. This relationship between old and new media is most effectively theorised as a process of *remediation*. Here, the content of one media context is transferred to another to create new media.⁴⁷ And, as Teri Silvio elegantly puts it, new media always incorporate 'experiences of older media, as well as the hopes and anxieties around the introduction of new media technologies

⁴⁵ Jonathan Sterne, *MP3*, 12; Stephen Cottrell, 'The Rise and Rise of Phonomusicology' in *Recorded Music: Performance, Culture and Technology*, ed. Amanda Bayley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 15

⁴⁶ My favourite description of how format informs musical reception and meaning comes not from music scholarship or journalism, but from a 1934 short story by William Saroyan, in which the protagonist and his phonograph exist in imbrication: 'The Phonograph was pretty much himself. He had gotten into the machine and come out of it, singing, or being a symphony, or a wild jazz composition ... these five-cent records reminded him that he had been silent through the phonograph for a long time, and that he might again enjoy emerging from it ... the sound was wiry. There was something about the dogged persistence of the passage that got into me, something about it that had always been in me, but never before articulated'. William Saroyan, '1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8' in *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze* (New York: New Direction Books, 1997), 75-82. Saroyan's writing is, to my mind, an interesting contribution to discussions of music and materiality.

⁴⁷ Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999); David Novak, 'The Sublime Frequencies of New Old Media', *Public Culture*, 23:3 (2011), 605

themselves'.⁴⁸ This perfectly captures the existence of historical field recordings in digital online sound archives, which have been heralded in the press with language emphasising the ability of new technologies to amplify the past: 'the unique online archive of recorded folk song, story and experience ... stands as possibly the most ambitious online oral archive of its kind in Europe if not the planet, harnessing the synapses of the wired world to give new and universal voice to the great unsung and the great untold'.⁴⁹

Many institutional sound archives now have recordings online.⁵⁰ The discourse of these online archives as 'windows to the past' maps neatly onto theories of remediation, involving twin, contradictory but mutually dependent, logics of immediacy and hypermediacy. Immediacy encourages us to forget mediation; hypermediacy encourages us to take pleasure in it.⁵¹ The digital – giving 'new and universal voice to the great unsung and the great untold' – at once hosts and vanishes, at once becomes a central node in a new network of listening and disappears from that same network. This discourse presents online archives as intermediaries rather than mediators: carrying content without transforming it, their output the same as their input.

While this is problematic, in many ways it makes sense: the past, which enacted agency in the postwar field recording moment, enacts agency again in the present. Online archives are the products of co-labour between past and present, dead and living, collectors and computers, singers and servers.⁵² The new digital environments in which field recordings now circulate are bound to the logic of the collector and the initial collection, and – by housing recordings in bespoke websites rather than, say, Soundcloud – in some

⁴⁸ Teri Silvio, 'Remediation and Local Globalisations: How Taiwan's "Digital Video Knights-Errant Puppetry" Writes the History of New Media in Chinese', *Cultural Anthropology*, 22:2 (2007), 286

⁴⁹ Jim Gilchrist, 'A Kist we can Clasp Close to Our Hearts', *The Scotsman*, 6/12/2010

⁵⁰ A few prominent examples: Association for Cultural Equity (www.culturalequity.org); British Library Sounds (<http://sounds.bl.uk>); Library of Congress (www.loc.gov/rr/record/onlinecollections.html); Musée d'ethnographie de Genève (www.ville-ge.ch/meg/phonotheque.php); Tobar an Dualchais (www.tobarandualchais.co.uk)

⁵¹ Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 13-14

⁵² This configuration of actors, both human and nonhuman, is similar to what Stanyek and Piekut term the 'intermundane': 'new arrangements of interpenetration between worlds of living and dead'. Jason Stanyek and Benjamin Piekut, 'Deadness: Technologies of the Intermundane', *The Drama Review*, 54:1 (2010), 14

regards re-perform, even strengthen, past groupings in new listening forums. Of course, simply lumping all recordings onto a platform like Soundcloud is not a realistic option for many archivists grappling with complex issues of copyright and intellectual property. But these groupings continue to supervise the reception and understanding of recordings, and re-perform national musics produced during the initial recording process.

Listening to a longer history, the mid-century recordists were also re-performing earlier groupings. In his inaugural address to the Folk Song Society in 1899, Hubert Parry proclaimed that 'in true folk-songs there is no sham, no got-up glitter, and no vulgarity', before going on to warn that 'there is an enemy at the doors of folk-music which is driving it out, namely the common popular songs of the day'.⁵³ The concern with circumscribing folk music as an alternative to patterns of commercial production, reproduction and consumption exists in a feedback loop, with actors repeating the same claims in different eras and contexts. But it is important to consider how the movement of musics into mass media circulation frameworks does not necessarily mark a decisive and inexorable turn from tradition to commerce. To borrow an idea from Tamara Livingston, the commodification of a tradition begins with the act of discursively isolating it from other musics, transforming it into a 'thing' which is then materialised into printed music, sound recordings, radio productions, and so on.⁵⁴ In other words, calling folk music *folk music* is itself an act of commodification, which is then rearticulated with each change in technology. The mid-century recordists insisted on these discursive divisions, echoing their ancestors; and these sonic circumscriptions continue to resound in digital archives and listening forums.

Another shift in perspective: these online archives are the flipside of the coin to what David Novak has termed 'world music 2.0'. Novak details the redistribution of existing recordings of non-Western popular musics, which

⁵³ Hubert Parry in Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990), 131. Parry's remarks are echoed in a YouTube comment on the Alan Lomax channel: 'No glitz, glam, or garbage that ruins true art!' <http://www.youtube.com/user/AlanLomaxArchive/feed?filter=1>

⁵⁴ Tamara Livingston, 'Music Revivals: Towards a General Theory', *Ethnomusicology*, 43:1 (1999), 79

already bear formal and technological relationships with Western popular culture, into an array of twenty-first-century media. Focusing on record labels such as Sublime Frequencies, based in Seattle, he illustrates how various world musics have come to be heard as 'experimental' by audiences in America. Such labels and likeminded bloggers hear their work as a 'corrective to the limited scope of academic field recordings': 'ethnomusicology, they claim, has focused on revivalist projects and ethnonationalist folk genres that cut out the noise of the street and the technologically driven beats of popular music'.⁵⁵ And a key protagonist in Novak's study is the sonic distortion found within world music 2.0 recordings.

Despite the differences between the musics in Novak's study and the present one, the similarities in reception and aesthetics are many. The fieldwork endeavours of Sublime Frequencies and Alan Lomax have both been invested with a punk rock approach by commentators.⁵⁶ Folk musics have also long been regarded as experimental, not least by many modernist composers who, according to Alex Ross, understood rural music as an 'archaic avant-garde', weirder than anything being composed in urban conservatoires and cafes.⁵⁷ And the distortion contained within ethnographic field recordings and Sublime Frequencies-type world musics have similar effects on reception.

Before I develop this point further, it is worth considering how understandings of both are also informed by the contexts in which we now listen. Anna Schultz and Mark Nye have updated Kay Kaufman Shelemay's model of technological eras in ethnographic recording (divided into phonograph, LP, and cassette eras) to take account of our 'unbound digital

⁵⁵ Novak, 'The Sublime Frequencies of New Old Media', 606

⁵⁶ Novak cites a review of the Sublime Frequencies website: 'Balls to fidelity, none of the artists here would be allowed within 10 miles of a Putamayo A&R executive, this is the punk rock of field recordings', in Novak, 'The Sublime Frequencies of New Old Media', 616. Don Fleming, Director of the Association of Cultural Equity (founded by Lomax in 1983) and earlier a member of punk band Velvet Monkeys, enthuses about Lomax: 'just the idea of him out in the field with his Presto recorder, dusting the thing off as it's running, it's all kind of punk rock to me', in Larry Rohter, 'Folklorist's Global Jukebox Goes Digital', *New York Times*, 30/1/2012

⁵⁷ Alex Ross, *The Rest is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Picador, 2007), 89

era'.⁵⁸ In this present, fieldworkers have been stripped of the technological privileges that came with the exclusive ownership and control of recording technologies. Now, almost anyone can record almost anything, and recordings are ubiquitous. As a consequence, older recordings, made in previous eras, accrue an elevated sense of value as historical documents by dint of their comparative rarity. The sound of historical recordings becomes aestheticised. And whereas certain world musics are valued for their geographical difference, historical field recordings are prized for their temporal difference.

In other words, they are imbued with a (perhaps exaggerated) sense of oldness, and become romanticised as a result. Ian Penman writes: 'hand-held recordings now sound the way old silent films look: monochrome, brittle, haunted—a new mourning'.⁵⁹ Field recordings can indeed *sound* old, and this fetishized oldness has four main contributing factors. First, and most obvious, the songs recorded are old, which is a main reason for them being recorded in the first place. Second, another result of the fact that the field recording projects of postwar Britain were in pursuit of the survivals of a pre-modern culture, is that microphones were thus keenly trained on old people. The voices we hear connote age, and *an age* far removed from our own. Third, despite efforts to create studio conditions in the field, the technological struggles involved in making these recordings are audible: we hear the bumps and crackles; we hear the machines creaking and moaning, wowing and fluttering; we hear the limitations (even through attempts to digitally 'clean up' sound files). And fourth, due to the aforementioned unavailability of most field recordings, their line with the present has been broken, lending them a rareness and antiquity, and a sense that online archives represent troves of long-lost treasure.

⁵⁸ Kay Kaufman Shelemay, 'Recording Technology, the Record Industry, and Ethnomusicological Scholarship' in *Comparative Musicology and Anthropology of Music: Essays on the History of Ethnomusicology*, ed. Nettl and Bohlman (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 279-86; Anna Schultz and Mark Nye, 'Music Ethnography and Recording Technology in the Unbound Digital Era' in *The Oxford Handbook of Mobile Music Studies, Volume 1*, ed. Gopinath and Stanyek (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 298-316

⁵⁹ Ian Penman, 'On the Mic: How Amplification Changed the Voice for Good' in *Undercurrents: The Hidden Wiring of Music*, ed. Rob Young (London: Continuum, 2002), 27

The online circulation of these recordings thus has what David Edgerton calls 'the shock of the old', whereby the obdurate persistence of old things – particularly in societies driven by ideologies of progress and innovation – can lead to unpredictable trajectories and proliferations.⁶⁰ Couple this with Anthony Seeger's observation that the most frequently requested collections from sound archives tend to be the oldest ones.⁶¹ And add to that Cottrell's assertion that an understanding of the meanings with which recordings may be endowed 'is possible only through a consideration of the cultural matrix within which it appears'⁶²; and we are left with interesting questions about the appeal of old field recordings in the digital age.

My response to this – and to conclude this section – is that field recordings exist within a *noise-fidelity dialectic*, continually animating their existence in relation to other recordings. The noisiness of field recordings can be understood as part of their appeal. Various writers – and countless people partaking in everyday musical discourse – have argued for the pleasures of audible distortion, for what Sterne calls the 'affective intensity of low-definition experiences'.⁶³ Robert Poss, for instance, asserts that distortion is truth, claiming that 'archaic, imperfect technology does in fact sound better—to everyone'.⁶⁴ His points of reference are 1960s studio technologies that contributed to the sound of that decade's rock and soul music, and while I disagree with his use of personal audio preference masquerading as sonic science, Poss's point that the 'audible intervention of certain recording techniques and technologies' are attractive is useful here.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ David Edgerton, *The Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History since 1900* (London: Profile Books, 2008)

⁶¹ Seeger, 'The Role of Sound Archives in Ethnomusicology Today', 266

⁶² Cottrell, 'The Rise and Rise of Phonomusicology', 28

⁶³ Sterne, *MP3*, 5. A good example is David Byrne's testimony of an early musical encounter: 'I first heard rock and soul songs on a tiny crappy-sounding transistor radio, and it changed my life completely. It was sonic, but it was also a social and cultural message that electrified me. Now I'm not saying that tinny sound should be considered satisfying or desirable, but it's amazing how lo-fi or lo-rez information can communicate a huge amount'—in Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology has Changed Music* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010), 219

⁶⁴ Robert Poss, 'Distortion is Truth', *Leonardo Music Journal*, 8:1 (1998), 47

⁶⁵ Poss, 'Distortion is Truth', 47. I prefer Sterne's argument that 'aesthetic pleasure, attention, contemplation, immersion, and high definition—these terms have no necessary relationship to one another. They can exist in many different possible configurations'. Sterne, *MP3*, 5

The kind of distortion discussed by Novak is equally pertinent. Distortion, in Novak's account, is an aesthetic icon, and the *infidelity* of recording machines serves to prove the presence of the original sound beneath. Ultimately, lo-fi distortion and noise become proof of authenticity for some listeners, providing a sonic distance from commercial products, and evidence that a type of music is unintegrated into the fidelities of the recording industries.⁶⁶ Steven Feld makes a similar point, highlighting how the grubby quality of many ethnomusicological recordings is conflated with authenticity in reception, disarticulating field recordings from the traffic of musical commodities.⁶⁷ Field recordings of folk and world musics, long considered geographically distant but culturally related, share these distortions and aesthetic functions.

At the same time, however, recordists and archivists in postwar Britain were very concerned with recording standards. The exigencies of archival preservation, broadcasting, commercial release, and – shot through each of these practices – adequate cultural representation meant that only certain recordings were selected to become history. Such selection processes were based on sonic as much as musical considerations. And so what we are left with today are those artefacts that were considered the best available at the time. Moreover, the reception of field recordings has been, and continues to be, contingent upon the ideology of fidelity; recordings are heard as transparent, unmediated, capturings of sound. Digitised and remediated field recordings thus exist in a dialectic of noise and fidelity: buffeted back and forth between the pleasures of distortion and oldness, and the dream of fidelity and presence.

⁶⁶ Novak, 'The Sublime Frequencies of New Old Media', 611, 624-27, 631

⁶⁷ Steven Feld and Donald Brenneis, 'Doing Anthropology in Sound', *American Ethnologist*, 31:4 (2004), 471; Novak, 'The Sublime Frequencies of New Old Media', 628. The low quality of many ethnographic field recordings can, again, perhaps be attributed to the theoretical shift away from collecting, and its textual focus, towards other modes of fieldwork, such as participant observation. But what Feld is arguing – and what his work demonstrates probably better than anyone else's – is that good field recordings can do both: can be of professional recording quality and can constitute a form of ethnographic knowledge in sound. This is especially the case when recordings are mixed 'dialogically'—that is, in collaboration between fieldworker and interlocutors. Feld and Brenneis, 'Doing Anthropology in Sound', 467

Archival Silence

Stripped of many paratexts – those clusters of language, image, or sonic framing that previously supervised the reception of field recordings when broadcast or commercially released – digitised recordings open themselves to new interpretations. A goal of repatriation is achieved. Digitisation adds to what Mark Katz calls the ‘contextual promiscuity’ of recordings as they drift into new settings and accrue new meanings.⁶⁸ Yet interpretations of the past as signified by recordings tend to be based on what we hear, not on what remains unheard. This section examines the silences of sound archives, and how national phonography informs how the nation sounds historically.

There are, broadly speaking, two meanings of the term *archival silence*. The first refers to gaps in a body of original records, whereby certain voices – ethnic or religious minorities, women, the ‘lower’ classes – are absented from a history which emphasises and consolidates the perspectives of privileged groups. The second stems from the digitisation and online availability of archival materials. In most cases, due to material constraints, archives are not able to digitise and upload the entirety of their collections. The selectivity involved in choosing material for online archives creates new silences, particularly when online presentations of archival holdings become ‘the archive’, and things are considered not to exist if they don’t exist digitally.⁶⁹

In addition, through the need to attract visitors to institutional websites, there has often been a tendency to upload the most well known or ‘nationally significant’ materials first, thereby perpetuating existing cultural biases. As historian Tim Hitchcock blogs: ‘for both technical and legal reasons, in the rush to the online, we have given to the oldest of Western canons a new hyper-availability, and a new authority ... we are in the middle of a selective recreation of inherited culture’.⁷⁰ This raises interesting questions about the ontology of online archives, where archivists are curators in an Internet in which everything is curated. But my concern here is mostly with the first kind

⁶⁸ Katz, *Capturing Sound*, 18

⁶⁹ For a useful overview of these issues, see archivist Kate Thelmer’s blog post on the implications of archival silences at <http://www.archivesnext.com/?p=2653>

⁷⁰ Tim Hitchcock, ‘A Five-Minute Rant for the Consortium of European Research Libraries’ – <http://historyonics.blogspot.co.uk/2012/10/a-five-minute-rant-for-consortium-of.html>

of archival silence: by probing the gaps in the original collection, and listening to how these absences enable the production of history, I aim now to bring a critical focus to the concept of national music.

In his meditation on how archives both reflect and introduce politics and power imbalances in the writing of history, Michel-Rolph Trouillot details how acts of silencing are involved in the creation of sources, the assembling of archives, the retrieval and recollection of materials, and the narration of history. Through these acts a historical corpus is created, and particular narratives become *the past*.⁷¹ Some archivists have taken up these issues with urgency. Rodney Carter writes forcefully on how the actions of the powerful deny marginal groups their voice; how power does not only reside with the state, but can be exercised by religious and ethnic groups, the wealthy and the educated; and how archives operate as a form of collective or national memory, with significant implications for those excluded.⁷² He advocates reading archives 'against the grain' to illuminate the discontinuities, ruptures, and gaps contained therein.⁷³ And, significantly for this study, he argues that national archives are particular sources of inequity and exclusion, by the very act of defining their scope.⁷⁴

Key to both Trouillot's and Carter's theses of power and silence is the control of the means by which history is produced. For my purposes this means recording technology. Technology repositions sounds across times and places, and generates discourse about those sounds as a consequence. Its use grants history to some, but denies representation to others. On first listen, it may seem wrongheaded to apply these ideas to online archives of traditional musics. How can the voices contained in such archives be exercising power of any kind? They certainly don't sound like voices of power. Surely they were recorded precisely because they represented marginal, even disappearing, cultures in the mid-twentieth century? Is the very idea of recording folk traditions not about building history from below?

⁷¹ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995), 51-58

⁷² Rodney Carter, 'Of Things Said and Unsaid: Power, Archival Silences, and Power in Silence', *Archivaria*, 61 (2006), 215-33

⁷³ Carter, 'Of Things Said and Unsaid', 224. Carter is drawing here on Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge*

⁷⁴ Carter, 'Of Things Said and Unsaid', 233

These arguments hold water only as long as national musics, and by extension, national identity, are regarded as the exclusive preserve of the white populations of Britain. Folk musics recorded in the 1950s were presented as an endangered culture at the same time as being heard as quintessentially national music. They at once occupy a position of marginality and official culture. They were imbued with narratives of outsider status and cultural fragility while being backed by national institutions and placed centrally in performances of national collective memory. This paradox is threaded through the postwar turn to the village as the site of nationness, the establishment of sound archives and national folklore as an object of academic study, the development of radio fieldwork to recover a nation free from outside interference, and the entry of national music into international circulation.

In other words, the people recorded as part of national phonography don't exercise the power to silence; but the recordists, archivists and culture brokers who recorded them certainly do. National phonography was part of a repertoire of efforts to maintain a closed sense of national culture in the postwar period. As Robert Winder puts it: 'at precisely the time when the national character was being diluted, attempts were made to distil it into its "pure" form'.⁷⁵ 'Britishness' has been consistently delineated against 'Black', 'Ethnic', 'Asian'—people who have been made British, through colonisation and nationality acts, have been treated like invaders on arrival, and continually positioned outside of national culture. (The same goes, albeit with different circumstances, for those recruited to work in various industries in Britain from elsewhere in Europe, and those given citizenship in recognition of wartime efforts.⁷⁶) Despite Clement Attlee's 1948 rhetoric that 'it is traditional that British subjects, whether of Dominion or Colonial origin (and of whatever race or colour) should be freely admissible to the United Kingdom', this tradition did not have any effect on considerations of what British culture was, or could be.⁷⁷ National character was not thought of in terms of Britain's cosmopolitan

⁷⁵ Robert Winder, *Bloody Foreigners: The Story of Immigration to Britain* (London: Little, Brown, 2004), 361

⁷⁶ Winder, *Bloody Foreigners*, 245-51

⁷⁷ Attlee in Winder, *Bloody Foreigners*, 262

ancestry, but as something rooted in the soil that was being unsettled by postwar migration.

There remains a pervading sense that some traditions are more traditional than others. Visiting a sound archive, whether online or otherwise, to listen to British traditional musics means listening only to white voices. Perhaps this is because there is no such thing as 'British traditional music'. Instead there is 'English' and 'Scottish', or sometimes 'English and Scottish', so the implied (promised, but all-too-often not delivered) inclusivity of Britishness is sacrificed for more narrowly defined nationalisms. It could also be argued that questions of race, immigration, culture and tradition are particular to England. Certainly the story of immigration to Britain, and the associated hostility and xenophobia, is anglocentric.⁷⁸ Yet, as Jackie Kay has argued, narratives of Scottish history and identity tend to exclude the slave trade: 'it's time that Scotland included the history of the plantations alongside the history of the highland clearances'.⁷⁹ So while many of the cultural groups that play prominent roles in Scottish tradition – the Gaels and the travelling communities – have indeed been historically marginalised, to give exclusive focus to particular cases of marginalisation, following Derrida's take on cosmopolitanism, only serves to further silence other groups.⁸⁰

Rather than a simple dichotomy of powerful and powerless, or of centre and periphery, the installation of certain cultural articulations and groups as embodying national tradition plays out instead as a series of moves. Groups with the power of definition select – or construct – a small number of peoples and bits of their music to represent the nation, positing them at the centre of a culture. These musics, now identified as folk or traditional, then go on what Bohlman calls a 'national journey':

When folk music follows the national journey, it undergoes a transition from representing the immanent quintessence of the nation to representing the nation itself ... National music follows a journey that

⁷⁸ Winder, *Bloody Foreigners*, x

⁷⁹ Jackie Kay, 'Missing Faces', *The Guardian*, 24/3/2007, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/mar/24/featuresreviews.guardianreview25>

⁸⁰ Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (London: Routledge, 2001), 6; Carter, 'On Things Said and Unsaid', 226

implicitly charts the landscape of the nation, beginning in the remotest core and reaching the end of the journey in the national metropolis.⁸¹

Often this metropolitan endpoint is a sound archive, and Bohlman makes the important point that 'the movement of folk music along the path of the national journey does not simply happen. Human agents undertake the journey and bring folk music with them'.⁸² Musicians and scholars and cultural workers physically transport rural music to urban centres, but it is technology that stores it there, enabling the nationalisation of that music. All other marginal groups remain outside of, or at best on the fringes of, national culture. They go unrecorded, denied representation, and archives are then used to verify the historical existence of national music and national culture.

In postwar Britain, these decisions were made along lines of race and ethnicity as well as lines of traditional versus mass culture, and indigeneity versus Americanisation. National culture, rather than being considered flexible and inclusive, was considered something under threat and in need of preservation. And while I do not wish to suggest here that it was wrong to record what was recorded, or that I am not grateful to be able to listen to those sounds produced through field recording, I do think it's important to listen critically to sound archives and their silences, and to think about issues of race that are largely absent from discussions of traditional music in Britain which continue to operate with an assumed whiteness. Maybe a simple lack of resources can explain gaps in the archive: recordists and institutions had limited time and money and so chose to focus on the oldest aspects of national culture first. This makes some sense, but it does not account for why postwar fieldwork entailed repeatedly collecting from the same sources. Such repetition suggests that, should it have been their will, recordists could have produced recordings to represent a more polycultural society.

Rather, postwar fieldwork employed the logic that Bruno Nettl calls 'oldies as goodies', through which 'collectors often sought what was specifically old, partly because it was disappearing but partly, one feels, also because what

⁸¹ Philip Bohlman, *Music, Nationalism, and the Making of the New Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 62-63

⁸² Bohlman, *Music, Nationalism, and the Making of the New Europe*, 65

was old was in a sense good'.⁸³ Nettl's further point that 'collectors even went out of their way to prove that what they collected was indeed old' applies here also, as it did for earlier generations of folklorists.⁸⁴ National phonography is thus a fine example of what Stuart Hall describes as the postwar effort to recover a 'set of cultural origins not contaminated by the colonising experience'.⁸⁵ From this angle, the focus on the rural in postwar field recording can be explained not only through the notion that it is where traditions or 'deep truths' of nationness could be found, but also because it was a means of avoiding recent flows of migration that problematised ideas of pure national culture. The majority of migrants settled in cities (often the poorest parts of cities), partly due to employment opportunities and the impulse to create communities of familiarity, but partly because they were unwelcome anywhere else.⁸⁶ The General Secretary of the National Union of Agricultural Workers argued in 1947 that 'to bring coloured labour into the British countryside would be a most unwise and unfortunate act'.⁸⁷ Whether such interventions reflected or shaped the national mood is debatable. Either way, recordists went (literally) out of their way to record people in places unaffected by postwar population change, and the presentation of rural culture was about anti-globalisation as much as anti-modernity in its technological forms. Exclusive focus on rural areas served to neatly sidestep, or deliberately avoid, cultural pluralism.

The decision not to record British subjects arriving in Britain at the end of empire can thus be read as just one of countless acts of inhospitality. Exclusionist postwar national phonography sits squarely within political attempts through the twentieth century, described by Paul Gilroy, to establish and maintain an essential difference between being British merely by law, and being a substantive part of British culture.⁸⁸ 'We are still a long way from comprehending', Gilroy argues, 'why Britain has shown itself to be incapable of

⁸³ Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-one Issues and Concepts* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 164-65

⁸⁴ Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology*, 165

⁸⁵ Stuart Hall, 'When was the Postcolonial?' in *The Post-Colonial Question*, ed. Chambers and Curti (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 246

⁸⁶ Winder, *Bloody Foreigners*, 267-68

⁸⁷ In Winder, *Bloody Foreigners*, 268

⁸⁸ Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, 46

coming to terms with its black and other minority settlers, why it has been quite so hopeless and resistant to the possibility of adjusting that imperilled national identity so that it might be more inclusive, cosmopolitan and habitable'.⁸⁹ As long as tradition remains synonymous with old white Britain, this resistance and sense of imperilment will remain. And online sound archives should be heard for the ways in which they reflect the attitudes of the time of the original collection: 1955 – the year of the IFMC Resolution on preservation, the *World Library*, the advent of rock and roll, *Tristes Tropiques* – was also the year that the now infamous slogan 'Keep Britain White' entered into political discourse.⁹⁰

Archival silence restricts representational space and denies history, contributing to the notion that immigration is somehow a new thing, rather than a long historical description of Britain. The 'intense engagement' of communities with repatriated recordings, reported by Landau and Topp Fargion, is not possible for those not recorded in the first place.⁹¹ The power to define national culture resides in the access to technology. National tradition has been constructed by those with such power in the media, in the academy, and in state-funded folklore institutions. (This perhaps goes some way to explaining why participation in traditional music in Britain has more recently been found to be largely the preserve of the educated middle- and upper-middle classes, whether in Milton Keynes in the 1980s, or in Scotland in the 2010s.⁹²) Given the expediency of certain traditions for cultural elites, I turn now to issues of legitimate culture and some paradoxes of preservation, before concluding this section by discussing the roles of archivists as legitimisers.

Preservation – one of the main planks on which postwar field recording was predicated – is in itself a weak rationale. The reasoning that posits

⁸⁹ Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, xxxvii

⁹⁰ Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, 47. Winston Churchill suggested to the Conservative cabinet that it be used for that year's election

⁹¹ Landau and Topp Fargion, 'We're all Archivists Now', 131

⁹² Ruth Finnegan, *The Hidden Musicians: Music-Making in an English Town* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2013[1989]), 58-70; Simon McKerrell, Understanding Scotland Musically webinar – <https://sites.google.com/site/musicsmeanings/home/outputs>

preservation as safeguarding cultural difference doesn't take account of the selectivity involved in choosing which differences to preserve. It is thus necessary to scrutinise the lines on which these selections have been made to better understand the logics of preservation and the contents of archives. Put simply, archival recordings are perceived as valuable moments of history precisely because most of history has been lost. Preserving everything, or achieving archival neutrality by representing all elements of society, is an impossible task.⁹³ No aspect of the past can be reconstituted in its fullness through an archive.⁹⁴

Moreover, lines of argument that assert that the most fragile or invisible aspects of culture are those most in need of preservation never seem to be applied to the many fleeting scenes, movements and subcultures that are forever popping up in music making. Richard Middleton, also questioning the ideology of preservation in folklore and ethnomusicology, jokes that many popular musics 'decay very quickly and are in great danger of disappearing!'⁹⁵ Unsurprisingly little effort is made to mobilise the mechanisms of folkloric salvage in these instances. Preservation, then, is always the preservation of the cultural values of the preservers as well as the music deemed to be in danger of dying out.

From a more philosophical footing, Derrida suggests that memory and forgetting are contained within one another, and that archives produce both at the same time. The outcome of this is that what is present within archives is defined by what is not.⁹⁶ And this textbook deconstruction is also at the heart of what Sterne calls the 'preservation paradox in digital audio'. The historical value with which recordings are imbued hinges on the belief that they provide access to the past. Yet this ideology of transparency is, for Sterne, contingent upon two prior conditions: first, it 'presupposes that certain recordings will be elevated to the status of official historical documents and curated in an appropriate fashion'; and second, in order for that process to occur, 'there

⁹³ Carter, 'Of Things Said and Unsaid', 216

⁹⁴ Sterne, 'The Preservation Paradox', 56

⁹⁵ Middleton, *Studying Popular Music*, 146

⁹⁶ Jacques Derrida, 'Archive Fever in South Africa' in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton et al (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2002), 54; Carter, 'Of Things Said and Unsaid', 223

must be an essential rarity of recordings from that period'.⁹⁷ The cultural performances 'captured' in archival recordings are given value as they preserve history that would otherwise be lost; but they can only perform this social function as most aspects of sound cultures were either not recorded and have thus never existed in archival form, or were recorded but then deteriorated or were disregarded.

The history contained within sound archives of traditional musics, then, is a production of historical national time-space based on fieldwork which itself was a production of historical national time-space. Both processes involve as much forgetting as remembering. And it is this doubleness that so problematises the idea that archives are 'windows to the past'. This isn't to say that we shouldn't take the metaphor seriously, but it must be acknowledged that what these windows open out onto is not a history of unmediated musicking, but institutional practices, modes of conceptualising and classifying musics, and the politics of technologies; that they are framed by mass media, and that they have been boarded up to keep much of the past out. Perhaps they are not windows at all, but kinds of funhouse mirrors that reflect distorted images back to the viewer, exaggerating some aspects of the scene and making others vanish altogether.

In any case, it is important to consider how online archives act to legitimate certain musics at the expense of others. Sterne writes: 'once granted, legitimacy can be treated as natural or inherent, and legitimate institutions can themselves become tools of endorsement or marginalisation'.⁹⁸ By re-performing groupings made in the mid-twentieth century, during Britain's field recording moment, legitimate institutions in Britain endorse the decisions made by their earlier incarnations: of purifying traditions, of audio decontamination, of securing the aural border. So when Sterne elsewhere asks 'why are some recordings available to us today and others not,' I'd add another question: 'why were some things recorded in the first place and others not'?⁹⁹ Both questions, considered together, can tell us much about

⁹⁷ Sterne, 'The Preservation Paradox', 59

⁹⁸ Sterne, *MP3*, 289

⁹⁹ Sterne, 'The Preservation Paradox', 57

what we're hearing and not hearing as the mediated past re-sounds in the present.

Many archivists are aware of the problems of archival silence and are working to fill gaps and increase representation in the archive. A bunch of research projects based at the British Library have endeavoured to break down barriers, or at least reduce the sense of distance, between the institution and the diaspora communities on its doorstep. Emma Brinkhurst highlights how a distrust of large national institutions can exist in displaced communities, and her work with the Somali community of King's Cross, London, has involved collaborative efforts to facilitate greater access to and representation within the neighbouring archive.¹⁰⁰ This work has also connected with the trend – instigated by Anthony Seeger and Steven Feld – of technological democratisation, whereby recordings have been produced as collaborations between the recordist and the community being recorded; or, increasingly, whereby recording technologies have been given or loaned to communities to make their own recordings. Such efforts, like those of Carolyn Landau with the Moroccan communities in Britain, enable communities to create their own archives within archives, and build towards a plural, polyphonic past.¹⁰¹

At the same time, archivists are engaging with the problems of gap filling and representation. Carter explains: 'silence is never absolute ... when a silence is discovered, there is the automatic desire to fill it with records'.¹⁰² Yet the politics of inviting the marginal into the archive are complicated, and archivists must vigilantly ask whose interest is being served in the creation of new records. In other words, as Carter highlights, archivists and recordists must resist the urge to speak for others and must not romanticise their collaborators.¹⁰³ Inherent in the desire to correct history is the risk of repeating it. And it must also be considered how silence can be a choice; that

¹⁰⁰ Emma Brinkhurst, 'Archives and Access: Reaching Out to the Somali Community of London's King's Cross', *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 21: 2 (2012), 243-58

¹⁰¹ Carolyn Landau, 'Disseminating Music amongst Moroccans in Britain: Exploring the Value of Archival Sound Recordings for a Cultural Heritage Community in the Diaspora', *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 21: 2 (2012), 259-77. Although much more democratic, it's worth pointing out that this kind of practice still involves various stages of selection: who to give technologies to; how people within communities then select representations of culture

¹⁰² Carter, 'Of Things Said and Unsaid', 225

¹⁰³ Carter, 'Of Things Said and Unsaid', 226

not everyone wishes to be heard, that silence can be invoked as an act of power on its own terms, subverting the archive in the process.¹⁰⁴ This can be an attempt to deliberately forget a traumatic moment in history for a particular group. Wendy Ugolini, writing about her experiences of recording oral histories of the wartime experiences of Italian communities in Scotland, concludes that silence can be 'adopted as protective cover'.¹⁰⁵ Certainly it is understandable why groups historically victimised by the nation might be ambivalent towards overtures to enter a national archive.

Recent public enthusiasm for field recording has not been limited to listening to remediated archival collections, but has also seen a related rise in interest in producing field recordings. This has coalesced into the formation of organisations like the Song Collectors Collective, sponsored by the EFDSS and Arts Council Ireland, amongst others, aiming to 'empower a new generation of collectors'.¹⁰⁶ (The Song Collectors Collective website retains, however, the rural iconography of previous generations of field recording—its background image featuring a lone white male walking, back turned to the camera, down a country lane with only trees for company. And when it encourages involvement in recording by exclaiming, 'want to revive the spirit of Cecil Sharp and Alan Lomax and get collecting', I feel a pang of uneasiness: Wait! Think it through! It isn't the collectors who need empowering! No more archival silences!¹⁰⁷)

Jokes aside, I'm not suggesting here that archiving without any gaps is possible, or that any one individual or institution can fully represent a community, culture or nation in the archive. Moreover, recording and archiving – whether scholarly, commercial, broadcast or otherwise – cannot exist without mediality, by dint of their existence within and as media. My argument here is simply to encourage that we recognise and acknowledge mediality, not that we abandon the recording and archiving project. The best thing, it seems to me, is to continue along the lines of sharing resources, making as much

¹⁰⁴ Carter, 'Of Things Said and Unsaid', 226–27, 230. Silence, in these terms, becomes, for Carter, an 'absent-presence'

¹⁰⁵ Wendy Ugolini, 'Ethnological Fieldwork' in *A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology: An Introduction to Scottish Ethnology*, ed. Alexander Fenton and Margaret Mackay (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2013), 76

¹⁰⁶ <http://songcollectorscollective.co.uk/about/>

¹⁰⁷ <http://songcollectorscollective.co.uk/>

material available as possible, strengthening networks among archives both nationally and internationally, and seeking collaboration with community members to cover more perspectives. The best archiving, for me, is that which empowers citizen-archivists: placing recording technologies in more hands, finding ways to stimulate and source recordings from multiple publics, and refusing any hierarchies of 'collector' and 'informant'.

So, while on the one hand there are efforts on multiple fronts to democratise recording processes and archival activities, on the other hand the agency of the past, the limited conceptualisation of tradition, and the paradigms of collecting and national phonography continue to inform current practices. Mid-century recordists and archivists worked, consciously, to legitimate certain sounds and musics; and to delegitimise, more or less consciously, other sounds and musics. The echoes of these labours bounce around the online spaces of archival digitisation. One effect of this, historically and in the present, is that diaspora communities have been forced to seek representation outside of mainstream institutions. To make sense of this, I turn now to the concept of heritage, with its national connotations and its ethnic implications.

Heritage and Ethnos

Historical field recordings are often now understood as heritage. The vocal and musical expressions on recordings are heard as cultural heritage, while the recordings themselves constitute forms of audiovisual heritage (some online archives contain the word in their name, while others have been funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund). Online archives, it can be reasonably claimed, are heritage sites, affording aspects of the same experience as those locations more familiarly positioned as such. This final section, then, considers field recordings and sound archives in relation to heritage discourse: borrowing from recent work in heritage studies, considering current intergovernmental practices, and paying particular attention to the connections between heritage and nation. Following on from the previous section, I will listen to heritage in relation to cultural anxieties about

globalisation, and give focus to the idea of a national ethnos nestled inside articulations of national heritage and national phonography.

First, I'd like to quickly sketch a few reasons why the audible past can be so resonant in the present. As well as issues of sonic aesthetics, the very idea of pastness can hold considerable appeal. Revival movements, for instance, tend to be built upon ideological as much as aesthetic considerations, seeking to restore earlier practices as a response to certain aspects of modernity. For revivalists, according to Caroline Bithell, 'the traditions of the past offer a welcome refuge from the complexities and confusions of modern life, serving as an anchor in the storm that threatens to tear identities from their roots'.¹⁰⁸ This emphasis on identity is also identified by Gary West, for whom tradition and heritage are ways of celebrating cultural difference on a global scale.¹⁰⁹ The contents of sound archives containing national traditions and heritage, in these terms, are a stabilising force: a solid past on which positive futures can be built.

Embracing the musical past often has an overtly political dimension. Clearly this can take on the character of conservatism – both large and small 'c' – and resistance to change, feeding on nostalgia of various kinds; but it can also represent a leftist critique of modernity, and, in Bithell's words, 'represent an alternative world-view to that predicated on a linear view of history driven by progress and betterment'.¹¹⁰ It can thus be argued that concepts of heritage and tradition are not inherently political one way or another, but contain interpretative space that affords their utilisation to various ideological ends. This explains why the field recording moment in postwar Britain involved individuals and institutions from across the political spectrum listening for, and seeking to utilise, the same musics. Strange and often uneasy networks of collaboration developed between Marxist folklorists, multinational record labels, supposedly neutral broadcasting companies and academic departments, right-wing newspapers and more. And these open politics have continued to play out in Britain, with folk music being appropriated by fascists and anti-fascists and more-or-less every position in between.

¹⁰⁸ Bithell, 'The Past in Music', 8

¹⁰⁹ Gary West, *Voicing Scotland: Folk, Culture, Nation* (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2012)

¹¹⁰ Bithell, 'The Past in Music', 9

Yet ideas of heritage as reaching us unproblematically from the past or from 'the people' tend not to take account of the ways in which heritage has been shaped and authorised by instruments of power. Or, drawing on Sharpian folk discourse of community selection and variation, these ideas posit the abstract force of 'time' as the arbiter of what becomes heritage and what does not.¹¹¹ But what is heritage? Where, and when, does it come from?

Laurajane Smith doesn't pull any punches. As the first line in the first chapter of her book, *Uses of Heritage*, she asserts that 'there is, really, no such thing as heritage'.¹¹² This isn't some iconoclastic statement, and is certainly one that she qualifies; but Smith's position is that there is, instead, a discourse about heritage that instructs our sense of what heritage is. 'Heritage discourse', she argues, 'thus naturalises the practice of rounding up the usual suspects to conserve and "pass on" to future generations'.¹¹³ Heritage is a set of values and meanings, which are bound together in what Smith terms 'authorised heritage discourse' (AHD). This discourse, in turn, obscures the work that heritage does to promote and validate a particular set of cultural practices.¹¹⁴

Like all concepts, heritage has a history. Smith traces the emergence of heritage discourse to late nineteenth-century Europe – particularly Britain, France and Germany – and finds a close connection to nationalism. Quickly, discourses of nation and race merged and naturalised connections between ideas of identity, history and territory; and a 'doctrine of blood and land' was established.¹¹⁵ The legacy of this history remains central to current heritage discourse, and there are three aspects of the way heritage has become institutionalised that are salient here. First, boundaries have been drawn around the concept of heritage that disconnect it from the present, confining heritage to the past, and meaning something can only be defined as such if it is sufficiently historic. Second, another boundary has been drawn that establishes heritage as the domain of experts, with the effect that heritage is always spoken about and for by those with the authority to do so, limiting

¹¹¹ West, *Voicing Scotland*, 13

¹¹² Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 11

¹¹³ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 11

¹¹⁴ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 11

¹¹⁵ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 17-18

debates about established values and meanings.¹¹⁶ And third, the primary form of identity associated with heritage is that of the nation, devaluing a diversity of sub-national cultural experiences.¹¹⁷

As I hope to have made clear, each of these three aspects of heritage can be found in national phonography. Recording and archiving those musics identified as traditional has almost always involved employing ideologies of pastness, speaking on behalf of those recorded, and indexing sounds to the nation. It is no coincidence that heritage in Britain has been identified as being closely connected with the conservative backlash against postwar social and economic change, and tied to insecurities of post-imperial national identity. National phonography sits squarely within these histories, and remediated recordings continue to speak to these issues.¹¹⁸

Other writers have explored the conceptual relationship between heritage, race, and nation. Like Smith, Rodney Harrison also finds that nations locate heritage exclusively in the past, thereby connecting the notion of shared cultural experience to the idea of racial and ethnic origins.¹¹⁹ The development of multi-ethnic societies thus represents, according to Harrison, a significant challenge to the concept of national heritage.¹²⁰ And he borrows from Stuart Hall's argument that heritage is part of the educative apparatus of the state, through which a national collective memory is formed: 'this process of selective "canonisation" confers authority and a material and institutional facticity on the selective tradition, making it extremely difficult to shift or revise'.¹²¹ In other words, no matter how much a national society changes, its official heritage will remain largely unchanged, thanks to the materiality of those artefacts earlier earmarked as tradition. Heritage gets 'set in stone' (or in this case, etched into discs or printed onto tape, then transferred into 1s and 0s), ensuring the endurance of normative narratives about nationhood.¹²²

¹¹⁶ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 12

¹¹⁷ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 30

¹¹⁸ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 39

¹¹⁹ Rodney Harrison, 'Multicultural and Minority Heritage' in *Understanding Heritage and Memory*, ed. Tim Benton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 169

¹²⁰ Harrison, 'Multicultural and Minority Heritage', 164

¹²¹ Stuart Hall in Harrison, 'Multicultural and Minority Heritage', 170

¹²² Harrison, 'Multicultural and Minority Heritage', 170

Stately homes, country gardens, grand monuments, battlefields—such things are bestowed with the ability to express Britishness (or Englishness or Scottishness) by institutions authorised to define, list, order and conserve national heritage. Class politics are shot through these processes, as is the messiness of Britishness containing multiple national heritages. Littler and Naidoo make this point well:

British heritage is the heritage of a nation of nations, shaped through waves of migration and diaspora, wide-ranging imperial histories and contemporary flows of globalisation. Not that you would necessarily know that from a cursory glance at many of its key sites and symbols. The St George Cross, afternoon tea and stately homes have often been used as emblematic of 'British heritage': a process in which white (and often upper- or middle-class) Englishness is used to define the past.¹²³

The subordination of non-English national identities rears its head again, although this problem is alleviated in regard to audiovisual heritage by the existence of archives in and for each of the British nations. And while a collection of folk songs is not a country house (I will come to the idea of Intangible Cultural Heritage shortly), both have been invested with value and the ability to express the nation, and these bestowals have tended to come from the same, top-down, approaches.¹²⁴

Field recordings thus make sense as heritage objects. The practice of celebrating their production involves the same sanitisation of the past that renders heritage generally a transmitter of messages only of relevance to the socially and economically comfortable.¹²⁵ Why do narratives of field recording invoke the progressive politics of giving voice and staking out a space for cultural difference, or of setting the past safely beyond time, but gloss over

¹²³ Jo Littler and Roshi Naidoo, *The Politics of Heritage: The Legacies of 'Race'* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 1

¹²⁴ Sometimes a sound archive *is* a country house. John Lorne Campbell and Margaret Fay Shaw's archive of Gaelic folk song is held at Canna House, owned by the National Trust for Scotland after Campbell gave the island of Canna to the Trust in 1981

¹²⁵ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 39

the anti-literacy drives and power imbalances of technological production? Whose England, whose Scotland, whose Britain are we hearing?

The effects of these processes on many minority groups and diaspora communities within and across these multiple national heritages are stark. Ashworth, Graham, and Tunbridge explain how 'the creation of any heritage actively potentially disinherits or excludes those who do not subscribe to, or are not embraced within, the terms of meaning attending that heritage'.¹²⁶ Heritage can thus be 'dissonant'.¹²⁷ And I'd now like to expand on a concept that sounds this dissonance, and sits at the centre of issues of national heritage, tradition, culture and identity, and the musics recorded to represent these ideas: that of a national ethnos.

In an essay on the intensification of globalisation after 1989, Arjun Appadurai argues that the idea of a national ethnos is fundamentally – often dangerously – contained within the idea of the modern nation state.¹²⁸ Appadurai's analysis is particularly relevant here as he tackles head-on the idea so often found in discourse on folk musics that musical traditions bear some intrinsic relation to the land: 'the idea of a singular national ethnos, far from being a natural outgrowth of this or that soil, has been produced and naturalised at great cost'.¹²⁹ The presence of any group, no matter how small, within a nation's borders that do not belong to this national ethnos produces an 'anxiety of incompleteness', creating a gap between the condition of majorities and the 'horizon of an unsullied national whole, a pure and untainted national ethnos'.¹³⁰ This fear of small numbers holds true for the Britain of the postwar period and of the early twenty-first century, where concerns about

¹²⁶ Gregory Ashworth, Brian Graham and J.E. Tunbridge, *Pluralising Pasts: Heritage, Identity and Place in Multicultural Societies* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 36

¹²⁷ J.E. Tunbridge and Brian Graham, *Dissonant Heritage: The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict* (Chichester: Wiley, 1996)

¹²⁸ 'No modern nation, however benign its political system and however eloquent its public voices may be about the virtues of tolerance, multiculturalism, and inclusion, is free of the idea that its national sovereignty is built on some sort of ethnic genius'. Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 3

¹²⁹ Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers*, 4. Martin Stokes makes the same point in relation to music, claiming ethnicities as constructions not essences. Stokes, *Ethnicity, Identity and Music*, 6

¹³⁰ Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers*, 8

immigration have been disproportionate to the actual percentages of population in question.

In addition, Appadurai links the idea of the national ethnos back to the phenomenon of tradition being used to stabilise identities. Securing notions of identity and national culture depends upon producing previously unrequired levels of certainty.¹³¹ Heritage can be consciously employed to reproduce identity in the face of the rapid acceleration of change.¹³² And the fear of loss that animated postwar field recording is reanimated in the digitised present. If we recall that the field recording moment sat at the culmination of Britain's anthropological turn, and that the end of empire was translated into a resurgent concept of national culture, whereby the nation was nostalgically and artificially remade as a knowable whole through acts of territorial phonography; then from this footing, online sound archives offer access to a purified past, and contain the promise of national wholeness. The secure nationness granted by remediated mid-century field recordings acts as a sonic salve against high globalisation. Recorded sound works to anchor history in a state of cultural flux; field recordings are valorised as evidence of national culture; completeness in the face of incompleteness.

The phenomena discussed in this section and the previous one – silence, forgetting, legitimacy, race, ethnos – are by no means exclusive to the translation of folk musics into national heritage in Britain. As part of a shift in heritage practices beginning in the 1980s and 1990s to increase recognition of minority voices and focus on history from below, there has been a move towards constructing a popular music heritage in Britain.¹³³ Yet Gurdeep Khabra, in an excellent article on British Bhangra music, highlights how this heritage has excluded most diaspora musics, as though these exist in a

¹³¹ Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers*, 7

¹³² Harrison, 'Multicultural and Minority Heritage', 167

¹³³ Official popular music heritage ventures in Britain have included the 'British Music Experience' exhibition at the O₂ arena in London, which was open between 2009 and 2014. Before that, the National Centre for Popular Music was opened in Sheffield in 1999, but closed due to lack of visitors in 2000. And English Heritage – although minimally concerned with popular music – has put up a few plaques to mark the abodes of famous musicians, including two for John Lennon. For a good insight into how popular music heritage reproduces canons, see Marion Leonard, 'Constructing Histories Through Material Culture: Popular Music, Museums and Collecting', *Popular Music History*, 2: 2 (2007), 147-67

separate history from the 'rest' of British popular music.¹³⁴ The result of this is that diaspora communities in Britain do not see themselves reflected in mainstream museums and archives, and have instead created 'informal community networks' to separately document and express articulations of heritage.¹³⁵ A shared sense of heritage is thus denied, and legitimacy continues to be the preserve of official heritage institutions.

The current status of folk and popular musics as heritage in Britain can perhaps be illuminated by the history of the National Trust. Initially founded in 1895, the Trust was the work of a group of socialists concerned with preserving common land for recreational use, particularly to ensure urban populations had access to green spaces. The Trust was established through an Act of Parliament in 1907, but by 1934 a new generation of Trust officials were being lobbied by the aristocracy to consider the 'plight' of the country house, as the landed gentry struggled to maintain these buildings. This was backed by legislation in 1937 and 1939. The Trust has since become mostly associated with properties of the elite, and has become a natural advocate for the conflation of elite heritage with national heritage.¹³⁶

The story of the hijacking of the National Trust is clearly not the same as the establishment of British traditional and popular music heritage. But are there not some general similarities? Movements initiated to challenge and destabilise privilege end up supporting privilege in different ways: British popular music heritage tends to highlight a rockist canon of bands from the 1960s and 1970s (some of whom are still going, and have been given the label 'heritage acts'), thus privileging the experience of white male baby-boomers who, speaking in the most general terms, have done okay as a demography anyway; and folk music heritage institutions in Britain continue to emphasise the importance of preserving musics that have for some decades been mostly enjoyed as part of middle-class leisure. This may be more egalitarian than celebrating only a past of monarchs and aristocrats, but the notion that these folk and popular music heritages are history from below is somewhat

¹³⁴ Gurdeep Khabra, 'Music in the Margins? Popular Music Heritage and British Bhangra Music', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 20: 3 (2013), 343-55

¹³⁵ Khabra, 'Music in the Margins', 348

¹³⁶ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 21-22

problematic. Both, if they were serious about the politics of representation, could pay more attention to what people from underprivileged and minority groups actually do with music in the present, and consider including those perspectives in conceptualisations of heritage and tradition.

Again, this isn't to say that these other forms of cultural expression should replace those currently propped up as heritage, but to say that they should be included and should be considered equal.¹³⁷ This idea doesn't come without problems. As Khabra points out, there are inherent difficulties in attempting to categorise a minority heritage: a term like 'British Asian' tries to translate a whole continent's worth of diverse diasporas into a coherent sense of community; and selecting one music, like British Bhangra, to represent this community works to the detriment of all other musics made by British Asian musicians.¹³⁸ Relatedly, expanding authorised heritage to include some minority heritage, for Smith, 'merely assimilates rather than challenges underlying preconceptions, power relations, or control over the process of defining heritage'.¹³⁹ These complexities have been part of the recent work of UNESCO in attempting to recognise heritage in different ways.

The concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) dates back to the early 1970s. UNESCO drafted a document entitled 'Possibility of Establishing an International Instrument for the Protection of Folklore' in 1971, and a 1973 letter sent from the Bolivian Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Organisation added momentum to this idea. In this letter, it was argued that existing international efforts to protect cultural heritage centred on protecting tangible objects, not on expressive forms such as music and dance. And this was true: cultural heritage in UNESCO's terms at this point meant World Heritage Sites. After several false starts and a fairly bumpy passage, an International

¹³⁷ It's worth qualifying this a little. Some archives, like the British Library's sound archive, were built upon public donations of material, rather than determining what constituted heritage. Elsewhere, some museums, like the National Jazz Museum in Harlem, are less about the display of heritage objects and more about providing public space for music enthusiasts and communities. See Frederick Moehn, 'Curating Community at the National Jazz Museum in Harlem', *Jazz Perspectives*, 7: 1 (2013), 3-29. And new projects are working to integrate museums, publics, and popular musics. See the University of Liverpool's Collecting and Curating Popular Music Histories project – https://www.liv.ac.uk/culture-network/research_projects/collecting_and_curating_popular_music_histories/

¹³⁸ Khabra, 'Music in the Margins', 346, 350

¹³⁹ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 37

Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage was adopted in 2003.¹⁴⁰ This gestation period involved a few tweaks to the basic premise of protecting folklore: an archival paradigm of collecting and preserving receded in favour of emphases on heritage as ever-evolving process, on guaranteeing the participation of local creators in identifying and revitalising forms of heritage, on the importance of intergenerational transmission, and on respecting the practitioners of a form of culture.¹⁴¹

The term itself is obviously a little unwieldy and conceptually awkward; splitting culture into 'tangible' and 'intangible' components is an unrealistic division and doesn't make sense. Yet it was developed as a means of overcoming confusions surrounding terms like 'folklore', 'oral heritage', 'traditional culture', 'customs', and so on, which mean different things in different places.¹⁴² And it worked to stress the need for recognition of cultural practices not represented by monuments, landmarks, and architecture, thus acting as a corrective to the World Heritage List.¹⁴³ This had an expressly political purpose. Framing heritage only as physical landmarks and monuments heavily favours the global north, leaving cultures from the southern hemisphere underrepresented. To redress this imbalance, the domains identified by the 2003 Convention in which ICH is manifested are: oral traditions and expressions, including language; performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and traditional craftsmanship.¹⁴⁴

From a distance, then, the development of ICH seems like a positive effort to redistribute control over defining heritage, particularly through emphasis on the participation of local creators in the selection process. Yet the onus is on national governments to develop inventories, and to then submit forms of culture for inclusion in UNESCO's lists of 'representative' and 'endangered'

¹⁴⁰ For a good history of these bumps and false starts, see Noriko Aikawa, 'An Historical Overview of the Preparation of the UNESCO International Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage', *Museum International*, 56: 1: 2 (2004), 137-49

¹⁴¹ Aikawa, 'Preparation of the UNESCO Convention', 146

¹⁴² Richard Kurin, 'Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in the 2003 UNESCO Convention: a Critical Appraisal', *Museum International*, 56: 1: 2 (2004), 67

¹⁴³ Kurin, 'Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage', 69

¹⁴⁴ <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00052>

ICH.¹⁴⁵ So the idea of authorised heritage discourse still permeates the processes of defining ICH. And some nations, including the United Kingdom, haven't signed up at all. At the time of writing, Britain has no ICH in official terms. (Work has been done in Scotland to consider the kinds of things that could be classified as ICH. A 2008 report produced by researchers at Edinburgh Napier University scopes out 'ICH in Scotland', rather than 'Scottish ICH', thereby aiming for inclusivity: recognising Polish alongside Travellers' Cant in Scotland's linguistic diversity, and the haggis pakora alongside Shetland fiddling in its cultural phenomena.¹⁴⁶)

In practice, though, many of the same issues of heritage discussed above have been a part of efforts to create lists of ICH. To their great credit, two scholars involved in the process have been willing to problematise and critique the concept of ICH even as they have helped to shape it. Anthony Seeger, writing of his experience of evaluating nominations, asserts that nationalism frequently informed decisions of which forms of culture were put forward by the nominating country. Dominant groups were favoured ahead of minorities, and, although many forms of culture exist across national borders, nations preferred to claim them as their own than submit joint nominations.¹⁴⁷

And Richard Kurin – Under Secretary for History, Art and Culture at the Smithsonian Institution – highlights how traditional notions of tradition have prevailed, ruling out all sorts of cultural forms that could be included in an expansive conceptualisation of ICH: 'avant-garde theatre, video games, pop music, Bollywood choreography, contemporary state rituals, McDonald's recipes, American football, astrophysics and university legal studies'.¹⁴⁸ Kurin goes on to argue that almost any cultural expression can be thought to generate traditions and form identities: 'such cultural forms as rap music, Australian cricket, modern dance, postmodernist architectural knowledge, and

¹⁴⁵ Kurin, 'Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage', 71

¹⁴⁶ Alison McCleery et al, *Scoping and Mapping Intangible Cultural Heritage in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Napier University, 2008)

¹⁴⁷ Anthony Seeger, 'Lessons Learned from the ICTM (NGO) Evaluation of Nominations for the UNESCO Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, 2001–5' in *Intangible Heritage*, ed. Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 121

¹⁴⁸ Kurin, 'Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage', 69

karaoke bars all symbolise cultural communities (albeit not necessarily ethnically or regionally based) and pass on their own traditions'.¹⁴⁹

Heritage, then, has an assumed progressivity for some, keying into movements of localism, supporting subaltern voices, and resisting corporate cultural homogenisation; but this position contains a number of blind spots – nationalism, dissonance and disinheritance, anti-youth culture, ethnos – which have led others to regard heritage as conservative, regressive, or, in Britain, even 'Thatcherism in period dress'.¹⁵⁰ The terms 'heritage' and 'tradition' seem to need constantly expanding or abandoning. The International Council for Traditional Music (which was the International Folk Music Council until 1981, when it was finally decided that it was impossible to define folk music) now announces as its objective: 'to assist in the study, practice, documentation, preservation and dissemination of traditional music and dance, including folk, popular, classical, urban, and other genres, of all countries'.¹⁵¹ Which is almost the same thing as saying, *all musics*. That this is the position of the same organisation that previously worked so hard to denigrate and devalue popular and urban music is interesting. And it suggests that the way the term 'tradition' is used in and across societies will continue to change with time.

Maybe 'heritage' and 'tradition' will eventually be put out to pasture, retired to the history of ideas. Or maybe their earlier, more restrictive, meanings will recrudescence, as national identities are deemed more vital and are re-purified as countries tighten their borders. Or maybe they will go the same way as 'authenticity', being reconfigured so as to describe musical experiences meaningful on an individual level, being subjectively ascribed but not treated

¹⁴⁹ Kurin, 'Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage', 69. Kurin identifies plenty of other pitfalls with ICH: recognising the fact that many forms of heritage (like female genital mutilation, or musical traditions where only men play instruments and only women sing, or any cultural output celebrating conflict with another community) are not consistent with human rights; spotting the problem of identifying spokespeople for a cultural tradition; and considering the risks involved in the Convention's call for nations to take 'necessary measures' to 'ensure' the viability of ICH—'surely no one rationally envisions the Convention as safeguarding the transmission of intangible cultural heritage through such coercive forms as legally requiring the sons and daughters who practice a tradition to continue in their parents' footsteps'—Ibid, 73-74

¹⁵⁰ Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory. Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1996), 290

¹⁵¹ <http://www.ictmusic.org/rules-ictm>

as inherent to particular musics.¹⁵² Or maybe they will do all of these things at once.

Whatever the case, the concept of national tradition remains, and likely will remain, important to many—even if the musical referents change. And the archives that contain ideas on what traditions and nations sound like will also remain important in efforts to understand the past. Yet the pastness contained in archives is that of modes of thinking about and capturing sounds to represent national cultures that are no longer valid. National phonography is something of a relic. The issues that render it a problematic concept do not necessarily emanate from ideas of tradition or heritage, or from the acts of field recording and sound archiving. Rather, they reside in the practice of employing these ideas to invoke the nation.

The idea that each nation has its own heritage that should be isolated and celebrated is basically what the IFMC were arguing in the 1950s. And while this position rode the contemporary bandwagons of tolerance and diplomacy and understanding and peace, it contained a number of contradictions. It relied upon international connections while attempting to stifle the ways in which communication is fluid and transnational. It relied upon sound reproduction technologies while blaming those same technologies for changes in cultural practices. It often claimed progressivity while denying people freedom of movement and expression. It built sounding nations through acts of silencing, built cultural memory upon erasure.

The pursuit of enclosed national musics was, ultimately, successful. The national phonographers did their job well. Across Europe we now have national archives of national sounds, resounding and rendering the past inseparable from the present. Sound archives – as staged soundings of place, as heritage sites, as museums of voice – point outwards towards just a few pasts amongst many, producing rather than capturing the nation. But the social functions of archives are different now than at earlier times, just as the things that recordings say to us are always in flux. We can hear their contents in different ways. The politics of archives and representation are

¹⁵² Allan Moore, 'Authenticity as Authentication', *Popular Music*, 21: 2 (2002), 209-23; Jeff Todd Titon, 'The Paradox of Authenticity' – <http://sustainablemusic.blogspot.co.uk/2008/09/paradox-of-authenticity.html>

fundamentally connected to the politics of nations and governance. The conversations we have with recordings are connected to the conversations we have about the societies we have built and want to imagine in the future.

Conclusion

The digitisation and online dissemination of historical field recordings acts as an invitation to another kind of past: a kind of past, identified by Appadurai, 'whose essential purpose is to *debate* other pasts'.¹⁵³ Online archives welcome a greater number of people to choose a past that fits their understanding of the present.¹⁵⁴ As Appadurai argues, however, our choices are constrained, and the past is not a 'limitless and plastic symbolic resource'.¹⁵⁵ Instead, interpretations tend to be restricted to what we can hear of the past, with everything else unknown and unknowable. My purpose in this chapter has been to ask questions of what field recordings and sound archives are, and to draw attention to the silences that exist within them.

The excellent work of repatriating recordings, of giving archives away in the spirit of reciprocity, has embraced the openness of interpreting the past; ultimately what field recordings *are* is up to those communities in which they were made in the first place. Sound recordings can be used in a variety of ways, and these uses can feed back into scholarly understandings of history and culture.¹⁵⁶ Or, as Robert Lancefield puts it, 'repatriation need not impose an agenda of local reversion to a purportedly pure, "authentic" practice defined and policed by outsiders, but can simply provide people with traces of their sonic past (if indeed they want them), to do with what they will'.¹⁵⁷ Yet as I have argued, when recordings are being re-circulated within Western societies like Britain, it is not always clear who those communities are—particularly when recordings were produced to represent a Sharpian folk culture that did not exist in the twentieth century (if indeed it ever did).

The critical arguments in this chapter have not been intended to dismiss the labours of postwar recordists and institutions; they were working with a set

¹⁵³ Arjun Appadurai, 'The Past as a Scarce Resource', *Man*, 16: 2 (1981), 218

¹⁵⁴ Bithell, 'The Past in Music', 5

¹⁵⁵ Appadurai, 'The Past as a Scarce Resource', 201

¹⁵⁶ Landau and Topp Fargion, 'We're All Archivists Now', 127

¹⁵⁷ Lancefield, 'Musical Traces', 59-60

of historically contingent logics, assumptions and practices that are very unlike now, and their efforts should be judged accordingly. Nor are they intended to denounce the work of archivists and digitisers who have undertaken valuable work in remediating and repatriating recordings, affording a huge public audience for these sounds and musics, and facilitating very positive developments in building more equitability into fieldwork-based disciplines of study. They are, instead, merely intended as a call not to assume that digital listening forums are innocent of the politics of collecting and representation that went into the production of recordings and their associated nation-building projects. Nor is there any reason why we should accept definitions of history and tradition inherited via sound archives as the only valid ones.¹⁵⁸ Archives can, and should, be inclusive—always building towards polyphonic pasts and presents.¹⁵⁹

I write this at a time when political discourse on immigration in Britain revolves around adherence to 'British values', and when the myth of British exceptionalism animates a referendum on the nation's place within Europe. Notwithstanding the fuzziness and further silencing involved in such practices, it seems pressing to attend to those historical moments when audible dimensions of national identity have been institutionalised, probing the gap between the discourse of national culture and the actualities of its

¹⁵⁸ My point here isn't dissimilar to one made by Philip Bohlman in 1988: 'To accept the existence of folk music in the modern world requires a reformulation of many of the conservative theories that scholars and ideologues have long used to delimit folk music as a genre. It requires that we amend intractable notions of isolation, ruralness, purely oral tradition, and primary function; those unwilling to do so have few choices but to track down vestiges or to reshuffle the pages of older collections'. Bohlman, *The Study of Folk Music in the Modern World* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), 139

¹⁵⁹ In this light, recent initiatives like the British Library's 'UK Sound Directory' project, which is attempting to create a 'comprehensive picture of the nation's sound collections' including those currently privately owned, is welcome – <http://www.bl.uk/projects/uk-sound-directory>. And using fieldwork to ask historical questions – or what Bohlman calls returning to 'the ethnomusicological past' – remains a good way to restore the voices of those silenced by history. Bohlman, 'Returning to the Ethnomusicological Past' in *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, 2nd edition, ed. Barz and Cooley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 246–70

construction.¹⁶⁰ If nationness is a cultural artefact, then it can be subject to the same constructionist analyses as other artefacts.¹⁶¹

Technologies are important to these stories because artefacts can outlive those who create and use them. This is largely so with sound recordings, which continue to store and carry political practices as they themselves are stored and carried. Mid-century national phonographers continue to be heard through the musics they gathered. And the various other agencies compressed into field recordings remain obscured, but nevertheless remain.

¹⁶⁰ Georgina Born, 'For a Relational Musicology: Music and Interdisciplinarity, Beyond the Practice Turn', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 135: 2 (2010), 238

¹⁶¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991), 4

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the history of field recording and sound archiving in postwar Britain, listening to a series of case studies: the recording policies of the EFDSS and IFMC; the sound archive at the School of Scottish Studies; the BBC Folk Music and Dialect Recording Scheme; and the *Columbia World Library of Folk and Primitive Music*. Through these projects I have sought to describe a set of logics and practices I have termed national phonography. I have also attempted to make sense of the current digital circulation of historical field recordings.

In the introduction I set out three aims: to highlight technologies, international connections, and silences in the production of national musics. I'd now like to recast these aims as a series of six conclusions, all interconnected and overlapping:

1) Field recordings are compressed performances, whereby the politics of technologies and institutional and material labours have been built into sound objects. These agencies and politics continue to resound in new digital listening environments.

2) Historical field recordings exhibit an oldness as they recirculate, based on the age of those voices recorded, the aging of technologies, and the temporal play of rescue fieldwork.

3) Audio heritage is staged sound. The recording encounters discussed in this thesis were about producing sounds for imaginative projects and purposes. Those industries and technologies that were heralded as bringing the demise of traditional culture provide us with sonic representations of that culture. Heritage is *media* heritage; media heritage *is* heritage.

4) Sound archives are performative. Sometimes they commission the sounds they then aim to preserve. More generally, they re-perform and strengthen groupings made previously, legitimating representations of national musics.

5) The sounding nation produced through field recording and archiving is built on silences. National music has been inscribed through a purification process that selects certain traditions to represent the nation. Often this was conducted along lines of ethnicity and ideas of national ethnos. This silencing denies representation and history to many minority cultures, thus also denying Britain's transnational history.

6) At the same time, the production of national musics is dependent upon internationalism: both as something to define the nation against; and as a form of collaboration, cooperation, and cultural production. Field recording in the British Isles was connected to field recording elsewhere in Europe and across the world, just as British colonialism was always present in the metropolitan centre.

So, while the nation re-sounds through digital dissemination, and the meaning of these recordings is fluid and unpredictable, historical silences remain profoundly silent, fixed and forgotten. The Britain represented through national phonography is of purified traditions, and in this thesis I've sought to listen to the current circulation of these recorded traditions and to the labours of their production.

Beneath the six conclusions presented here is a set of trickier questions about the maintenance of cultural traditions, change and continuity. I've been concerned throughout this research that highlighting the production of national traditions could be perceived as siding with corporate globalisation and some monolithic culture industry. But, on reflection, I reject the terms of the debate, as it reduces history, and the existence of that history in the present, to a set of artificial binaries: folk and fake, national and international, tradition and modernity, good guys and bad guys, music made by the people and music made for the people. To my mind, it's more productive to consider

how these supposed sides are entangled, bound up together, contained within and mediating one another. And, for me, it's more interesting to think about how representations of folk cultures have been created within and for mass media, alongside those other expressive cultures that were held as threatening to the existence of tradition.

What this research has not covered in great depth is the historical reception of field recordings. Although I've sought to show how discourse was produced to accompany the circulation of recordings and supervise their reception, it remains unclear how listeners perceived these recordings at the time. One could caveat this by arguing that it's impossible to know how sounds were understood historically; that all we can do is trace their exteriorities.¹ The flip side of this is that researchers can intervene in the social lives of recordings in the present, interrupting their trajectories in the attempt to return them to the communities in which they were made. As explained, this has increasingly been part of ethnomusicological fieldwork in recent times, but as also explained, a different set of issues pertain to the recirculation of national musics in somewhere like Britain.

I made the decision not to include this kind of fieldwork in this thesis, partly because the recordings I've discussed here are already circulating quite happily, through websites and workshops and media coverage; but also because I wanted to explain as best I could the historical production of these recordings, which I believe required a whole thesis to do. Nevertheless, a good follow-up project would be to conduct an ethnography of how online sound archives are used and how their contents are heard. Perhaps an even better project would be to use fieldwork to research the histories of music making in some of the communities in Britain deliberately silenced by national phonography.

At the time of writing, the space for multiple identities is needed in Britain and across Europe. I have argued here that in many ways national

¹ 'History is nothing but exteriorities. We make our past out of the artefacts, documents, memories, and other traces left behind. We can listen to recorded traces of past history, but we cannot presume to know exactly what it was like to hear at a particular time or place in the past. In the age of technological reproduction, we can sometimes experience an audible past, but we can do no more than presume the existence of an auditory past'—Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 19

phonography denies those multiple identities, by representing national music as a traditional core. Efforts to develop a European consciousness through historical sound recordings are currently underway through the Europeana Sounds project.² But it could be argued that this endeavour is still tethered to the historical production of national musics.

If I have been critical of historical practices of field recording and sound archiving in this thesis, it is not because I wish to denounce the work of those mid-century phonographers. It is more out of concern that the return of these recordings to the public sphere has been accompanied with a discourse celebrating the work of recordists as heroic salvage, without probing the politics that position fieldwork as salvage in the first place. My final point, then, is that we shouldn't be seeking to emulate the work of national phonography in the twenty-first century. We can do better. And this perhaps is not about finding more inclusive ways to define national culture, but asking why it is necessary to define national culture at all.

² <http://www.europeanasounds.eu/>

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BBC WAC – BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham, Reading, UK

BL PK – Peter Kennedy Collection, World and Traditional Music, British Library, London, UK

HH – Hamish Henderson Archive, Centre for Research Collections, University of Edinburgh, UK

VWML – Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, English Folk Dance and Song Society, London, UK

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Art of Record Production – <http://www.artofrecordproduction.com/>

Association for Cultural Equity – <http://culturalequity.org/>

British Library Sounds – <http://sounds.bl.uk/>

Calum Maclean Project – <http://www.calum-maclean-project.celtscot.ed.ac.uk/home/>

Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music – <http://www.charm.rhul.ac.uk/index.html>

Europeana Sounds – <http://www.europeanasons.eu/>

Library of Congress Online Audio Collections – www.loc.gov/rr/record/onlinecollections.html

Musée d'ethnographie de Genève Phonothèque – <http://www.ville-ge.ch/meg/phonotheque.php>

Song Collectors Collective – <http://songcollectors.org/>

Tobar an Dualchais – <http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/>

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Discography

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